

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and the members of the Committee,

My name is Anya Kleinman, and I am a high school student in Montgomery County. I am also the Director and Co-Founder of Vote16MD, a statewide coalition working to lower the voting age to 16 in Maryland's municipal and countywide elections. I am writing in strong favor of House Bill 0052, the "Your School, Your Voice Act".

As you know, the decisions of a county's Board of Education are immensely influential, impacting the everyday lives of students. Whether it pertains to mental health, budgetary adjustments, or in-school safety, Board of Education choices are of weighty consequence for students across Maryland. As a result, we must provide counties with the opportunity to enfranchise 16- and 17-year-olds. You may be thinking: Why 16? Well, according to a [study](#) conducted by the College of William & Mary Law School, at 16, individuals are cognitively capable of making thoughtful and comprehensive voting decisions.

Data across the state suggests that Board of Education elections experience resoundingly low voter turnout during presidential election off-years. For example, in Montgomery County's 2022 Board of Education election, many districts [reported](#) voter turnout rates of around 35%. These numbers are worse in other counties. When a minority of registered voters cast a ballot, Board of Education election results are not truly representative.

However, evidence shows that 16- and 17-year-olds are very reliable voters, with a voting rate up to 200% higher than the general population. Additionally, lowering the local voting age, as seen in Maryland municipalities like Takoma Park, leads to an increase in the general voting rate. Thus, the "Your School, Your Voice Act" provides counties with a unique opportunity to create more representative and democratic elections.

It's not just a matter of turnout; Voting is [habit forming](#). Allowing individuals to begin voting earlier in life has the potential to improve life-long civic participation, creating a generation of engaged and active voters. The "Your School, Your Voice Act" doesn't just allow counties to enfranchise 16- and 17-year-olds; It allows counties to prepare thousands of young people to contribute meaningfully to democracy for the rest of their lives.

With this in mind, I urge the Committee to support HB0052 and take this essential step toward encouraging and extending youth civic participation in Maryland. Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,
Anya Kleinman
Vote16MD Director