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Ways and Means Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
100 State Cir
Annapolis, MD 21401

Delegates,

I am writing to express my strong support for allowing counties to lower the voting age for school board elections.

When I was 16, I voted in my first election. I was lucky enough to grow up in a town that had lowered the voting age to 16 and took full advantage of it. My vote inspired in me a sense of strong civic duty. Shortly after casting my vote, I started attending meetings with the Vote16 Research Network at the University of Maryland. When I was 17, I woke up at 5 am to serve as an election judge for an election that I was 6 weeks too young to vote in. I have continued to serve as an election judge in future elections. I have continued to advocate for the enfranchisement of young people and see this bill as a strong step toward that goal.

Research and practical experience have demonstrated that lowering the voting age fosters lifelong civic engagement. Voting is a habit that, when developed early, leads to increased participation in future elections. Sixteen-year-olds are uniquely positioned to form this habit, as they are often in stable environments supported by families, educators, and communities that encourage civic learning and action. Cities with lower voting ages have seen higher turnout rates among 16- and 17-year-olds compared to older first-time voters, proving that young people are eager to participate when given the chance. Moreover, 16- and 17-year-olds contribute meaningfully to their communities. They work, pay taxes, and are affected directly by decisions made by boards of education. By enfranchising students, not only do we give them more input into the decisions that directly affect them every school day, but we also invigorate the democratic process and set them up for future success. By letting counties make this choice for themselves, we emphasize the importance of local governments and allow them to choose more inclusive election policies

Lowering the voting age offers an opportunity to build on the successful examples set by neighboring cities and demonstrates a commitment to preparing the next generation of voters. I urge you to seize this opportunity to lead boldly and inclusively by giving counties the opportunity to lower the voting age. Doing so will enhance the importance of our local democracies and affirm Maryland's role as a trailblazer in empowering all citizens.

Thank you for considering this important measure. I am confident that your leadership will help create a more engaged and representative community.

Michael Lynch