



Maryland Youth Advisory Council
c/o Governor's Office Children
100 Community Place,
Crownsville, MD 21032

Alexander Hossainkhail, *Chair*
Thomas Evans, *Vice-Chair*
Folashade Epebinu, *Secretary*

January 17, 2025

Re: HB 52 | Election Law - Voting Age - Board of Education Elections (Your School, Your Voice Act)

Dear Chair Atterbeary and the Ways and Means Committee,

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council prides itself on being a coalition of diverse young advocates and leaders who serve as a voice for youth in the state of Maryland. As leaders in our communities, and as appointees of the Governor, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House, Maryland Association of Student Councils, Maryland Higher Education Commission, and the University System of Maryland, we take every opportunity to address relevant issues by influencing legislation, spreading public awareness and serving as a liaison between youth and policymakers regarding issues facing youth.

HB 0052 authorizes the General Assembly to sanction a county to lower the age at which an individual may vote in an election for members of an elected county board of education, including allowing a county to implement a local law that allows a person 16 years of age to vote in such ballots.

Research consistently shows that young people care about political participation. In the 2022 midterm elections, over 50% of 18- to 29-year-olds turned out to vote, one of the highest youth turnout rates in decades. Furthermore, jurisdictions that have lowered the voting age to 16, such as Takoma Park, Maryland, have reported that 16- and 17-year-olds vote at rates comparable to or higher than older voters. By allowing youth to vote in school board elections, HB 52 builds civic readiness early, empowering youth to establish lifelong habits of engagement while ensuring that decision-makers reflect the diverse voices of our communities.

Students are affected by the choices made by their respective boards of education every day. From transportation to funding to course requirements and curriculum, *we the students*, are the stakeholders best equipped to articulate problems facing our school system. **HB 0052** lowers the age to vote for these ballots will ensure that youth have the opportunity to decide those who directly affect their everyday lives and determine the quality of their received education.

Young people have a great interest and care about political participation. Takoma Park, Maryland, provides insight on youth voter turnout: in 2020, 69% of the registered 16- and 17-year-old voters participated in that year's election. In comparison, only 54% of all registered voters voted that year, inciting that youth continue to take advantage of opportunities to become civically engaged, even more

than many adults.¹ Furthermore, 71% of youth, ages 14 to 17, report being civically involved.² **HB 0052** would provide the youth of Maryland with greater civic readiness opportunities, vital for their civic engagement as adults; high levels of current civic readiness among youth will induce a more civically engaged population, in the subsequent decades.

HB 0052 allows Maryland youth to engage with their representatives and teaches young people about the importance of civic engagement. The Council has voted in favor of endorsing **HB**, as it aligns with the Council's Legislative Platform supporting:

- a. Youth involvement in the creation and revision of legislation impacting youth. (Article I, Clause E),
- b. Opportunities for youth to be a part of community and statewide decisions. (Article I, Clause F).

HB0052 advances equitable access to resources and expands civic readiness among marginalized and underrepresented youth. By lowering the voting age for Board of Education elections, this bill empowers Maryland's youth to participate in the democratic process, shaping policies that directly affect their education and future. By providing 16 and 17-year-olds, the youth of Maryland, opportunities to vote in local elections, Maryland is encouraging early civic participation and accountability, building lifelong habits of engagement. For these reasons, the Council supports **HB 0052** and respectfully requests a favorable report from the committee. We thank you for considering this essential legislation.

Sincerely,



Alex Hossainkhail
Chair, Maryland Youth Advisory Council

¹ Washington Monthly. (2022). "The Case for the 16-Year-Old Vote." *University of Maryland School of Public Policy*. <https://civic.umd.edu/news/case-16-year-old-vote>. Accessed 17 Jan. 2025.

² Orgera, K., Mendez, I., Alvarado, C., Alberti, P. (2024). "Get Out the Vote: Cultivating Civic Engagement in Youth and Adults." *AAMC Center for Health Justice*. <https://www.aamchealthjustice.org/news/polling/get-out-vote>. Accessed 17 Jan. 2025.