



Sam Novey, Baltimore Votes

Testimony for HB245

Ways and Means Committee, Thursday, Feb. 6, 2020

Election Law - Institutions of Higher Education - Voter Registration and Voting by Students (Student Voter Empowerment Act of 2020)

POSITION: FAVORABLE

I am here today on behalf of the Baltimore Votes Coalition. Led by an advisory board of leading organizations dedicated to civic engagement in Baltimore City, Baltimore Votes' support community based efforts to increase voter participation in Baltimore City. In 2018, our Parties at the Polls effort supported non-partisan events 80 of the 297 precincts Baltimore City. We are working to get to all 297 for this November.

I also speak to you today as someone who has spent much of the last eight years working with various organizations to increase student voter participation at campuses across the country. In that capacity, I was very proud to work with Delegate Luedtke to convene many leaders on student voting this fall at the University of Maryland to learn from some of the great work happening there and build a community of practice working to achieve full student voter participation. Thanks to your leadership, Maryland is on the cusp of becoming a national leader on student voting rights.

I want to thank the Ways and Means Committee for the opportunity to share my perspective on why this bill is so important. I want to thank Delegate Luedtke again for introducing the bill and for being such a steadfast champion for democracy in Maryland.

I urge delegates to vote in favor of HB 245, the Student Voter Empowerment Act of 2020. The Student Voter Empowerment Act ensures that students have the resources and information necessary to register and turn out to vote.

Every Marylander has something essential to give to our democracy. And we are all worse off when we collectively fail as a state and as a community to cultivate an election process and public culture of democracy that includes every Marylander. This bill matters because elections are a test of who we are as a state. Are we going to be the kind of state that leaves people out? Or are we going to be the kind of states that values the contributions of each of its citizens?

This bill takes a big step forward in supporting the work that local leaders are doing across the state to build an inclusive democracy. Baltimore Votes is proud to support the efforts of many

colleges in Maryland to develop voter engagement programming. We celebrated local leaders at University of Baltimore being the only campus in the country to win a gold seal from the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge for having a voter participation rate above 70% in 2016. In 2018, Johns Hopkins throw a “party at the mailbox” to include students voting absentee. At Loyola University, they supported not only the voter participation of their own students but also of neighbors in precincts in the York Road Corridor. And at MICA, we were blown away this year when their team achieved the highest voter registration rate in America - 95%.

Those are just a few of the stories of the impact that remarkable leaders at Maryland campuses are having when they decide that their institutions are going to be the kind of place where no one is left out of our democracy. Last week, Washington Monthly Magazine ranked 5 Maryland Institutions as among the “top colleges and universities in the country for student voting.”

For many years, student voting rates - especially for non presidential elections - were stubbornly low and mostly unchanging all across the country. But something extraordinary happened in 2018. According to the national study of learning voting and engagement, voting rates doubled from 2014 levels to nearly 40%. At some institutions, including many in the state of Maryland, student voting rates tripled or even quadrupled from 2014 levels.

Now is the time for the state of Maryland to step up and build on this progress. Passing this bill will provide essential support and resources to help the local leaders driving this change on campuses across our state. Members of the Baltimore Votes Coalition and our partners across the state are ready and excited to do whatever it takes to assist colleges in our community and provide the support they need to meet these important standards. Together, we can serve the students of this state and position Maryland as a critically important national leader and model for student voting rights across the country.

I urge the delegates to give this bill a favorable report and thank you so much for your time this afternoon.