



Testimony to the [Ways and Means Committee]

**HB245: Election Law - Institutions of Higher Education - Voter Registration and Voting by Students
(Student Voter Empowerment Act of 2020)**

Position: Favorable

Thursday, Feb. 6, 2020

Ways and Means Committee
Room 131
6 Bladen St.,
Annapolis, MD 21401

Honorable Chair Anne Kaiser and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jordy Diaz and I am a sophomore at Towson University studying Political Science and also serve as the Director of Legislative Affairs for the Towson University Student Government Association. I want to thank Delegate Luedtke for taking his time and listening to our concerns. We have worked together on this bill because it is important that we remove any hurdles that make it difficult for students to vote. As Director of Legislative Affairs I have worked with The Office of Civic Engagement & Social Responsibility at Towson University and with student representatives from the Andrew Goodman Foundation to increase voter participation at our campus. Barriers to student voting has been one of the greatest obstacles we as students face when wanting to exercise our right to vote. Towson University had no policies in place pertaining to excused absences from classes when exercising this right. This is why we worked on introducing a bill that addressed this issue by having election day be a university wide holiday so students would not have to worry about classes on election day. This bill passed unanimously within our SGA showing that we at Towson take our responsibility as citizens to vote very seriously.

Before I came to Towson I grew up in Bethesda with my family from Honduras. Since I was young my parents taught me the importance of being involved in my community and reinforced the idea that I had a unique opportunity living in the United States. This is one of the reasons why I was motivated to join the SGA at Towson University and to be an active member of the student community. I became interested in this bill because I believe we should make every effort to increase voter participation by making voter registration and the act of voting simple and accessible to all eligible voters. I want to bring this belief into reality here at Towson University and at all other Universities in the state. Towson University has already added a polling station which is outlined in the bill and it has helped to significantly increase voter turnout within the student population. According to National Study of Learning, Voting and Environment (NSLVE) 42.2% of TU students voted in the 2018 midterm elections. This is a significant increase in student voter participation compared to the 2014 midterm election in



which only 20.7% of the students voted. Voting serves as a building block to more active involvement in civic life. Numerous studies have shown that voting is habit-forming, and young people who vote are more likely to become life-long voters. Universities serve to prepare us for life in the real world so this is why we should reinforce the importance of voting to students so they can keep these habits for life.

Our state should take this opportunity to step up and be a national leader on democracy issues. We can assist students all over the state become active voters by beginning to pass this Act and removing these barriers that have a direct impact on our voter turnout. .

For all these reasons, we support HB245 and urge a favorable report.

Best,

Jordy Diaz
Director of Legislative Affairs