

The University of Maryland Student Government Association

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

On behalf of the Student Government Association, we would like to thank Delegate Luedtke for introducing this bill. We would also like to thank the Ways and Means Committee for the opportunity to explain how some of the measures in the bill, that we've already implemented at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMD), have helped us raise our student voting rates significantly in 2018.

UMD has already implemented policies that this bill would mandate us to do, and we've garnered measurable success from them. In 2018, we launched a TerpsVote website, with information about early voting, absentee voting and voter registration. We included a list of voter registration and absentee ballot request deadlines for all 50 states and Puerto Rico. The website had over 5,000 page views by December 2018. Just in the 36 days leading up to the election, more than 2,600 new users visited our site.

We already have two polling places on Election Day, one at the Stamp Student Union, and another at Ritchie Coliseum. These voting locations provide students who live on or around campus the opportunity to vote in a convenient location on Election Day, without having to travel far in the middle of their course schedule. However, not every student is registered to vote in College Park and to give them the opportunity to vote at home, students deserve unexcused absences in their classes to allow them to exercise their most fundamental civic duty. This is the logical next step in UMD's continued support of civic engagement and something that students across the state should have access to.

As a result of all of our efforts, we were able to raise the rate of students registered to vote by 8.6 percent from 2014 to 2018, according to the *National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement*. We also raised the rate of students who actually voted by 26.7 percent in 2018 from 2014, according to the same study. Our total percentage of students registered to vote is 85.3 percent and our voting rate is 46 percent. These increases could not have happened without the changes in our policies and practices.

The policies outlined in HB 245 have already helped increase student voting rates at UMD and these successes could and should be replicated on every college campus in Maryland. The passage of this bill is critical in raising student voter rates on Maryland campuses so the Student Government Association asks you to vote yes on this bill.

Sincerely,

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Student Body President

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Director of Government Affairs

Alexandra Marquez
Director of Civic Engagement