



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL  
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND**

**KATE STEWART**  
VICE PRESIDENT  
MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL

**HB 373 - Election Law - Voting Age - Board of Education Elections**  
**Testimony of Kate Stewart, Montgomery County Councilmember, District 4**  
**Position: SUPPORT**  
**February 6, 2024**

My name is Kate Stewart and I serve as the Montgomery County Councilmember for District 4 and as the Vice President of the Montgomery County Council. Today, I am speaking on behalf of myself in support of **Election Law - Voting Age - Board of Education Elections (House Bill 373)**. This legislation would enable counties to enact a local law that allows an individual who is at least 16 years of age to vote in an election for members of an elected county board of education.

I follow this issue with interest, as I previously served as the Mayor of Takoma Park, the first city in the United States to lower the voting age to 16 in municipal elections in 2013. Since 2013, voter turnout for youth in Takoma Park has increased every year. In 2017, 48 percent of registered youth voted compared to just 22 percent of registered 18+ voters in the city. Takoma Park is not the only city in Maryland that allows youth voting. Four other cities have lowered their voting ages to 16 for municipal elections—Greenbelt, Hyattsville, Riverdale Park, and Mount Rainier. There is precedent for this bill as well, as the cities of Berkeley and Oakland in California have approved a lower voting age for school board elections.

Not only would this bill allow young people to have a greater voice in who is making the decisions that most affect their everyday lives—their Board of Education—but it also promotes positive voting habits. Research shows that 16 and 17-year-olds regularly turnout more than 18 to 21-year-olds. The practice of voting as an 18 year old when one is in a period of transition, either with school or their career, leads to low voter turnout for our youngest age group. Lowering the voting age to 16, even just in elections for school boards, increases overall voter turnout and creates a new cohort of lifelong voters. In addition, 16-year-olds can hold jobs and pay taxes, can consent to get married, drive cars, pay for insurance, and otherwise have adult responsibilities that contribute to our community both economically and socially. They should also be allowed to vote in school board elections.

Those of us who serve as elected officials know only too well the importance of turning out people to vote and the importance of our constituents engaging in public discourse by voting. Maryland's 16 and 17-year-olds deserve to have that same opportunity which is why I urge you to support HB 373 and invest in our young people.