

Testimony for Maryland HB 0373

I write to you today as the director of Vote16USA, a national initiative advocating for the lowering of the voting age to 16. I urge you to support Maryland's House Bill 0373, a progressive measure that mirrors the efforts we have supported in New Jersey and across the nation to enhance youth civic engagement.

As an organization dedicated to generational and racial equity, Vote16USA champions the voice of young people, especially those of color, in shaping policies that affect their educational journey and future. Currently, young voices are scarcely heard in the election of school board officials who influence their lives significantly. HB 0373 promises to correct this disparity, empowering 16 and 17-year-olds in Maryland to have a meaningful say in their education system.

By endorsing this bill, Maryland can join the ranks of progressive states that recognize the importance of early civic engagement. It would send a powerful message that young people's perspectives are valued and their votes count.

Maryland has been at the forefront, with seven of its municipalities, including Takoma Park, already having lowered the voting age for municipal elections. HB 0373 extends this leadership by providing each county the discretion to empower its youth in school board elections. This bill is not only about inclusivity but also about preparing a generation to be informed and engaged citizens.

It's evident from recent polls by CIRCLE and the Harvard Institute of Politics that there's a national decline in the voting propensity among young people, particularly in Black and Hispanic communities. HB 0373 offers an opportunity to counteract this trend, providing young people with the avenues they need to participate in democracy.

In conclusion, HB 0373 is a beacon for representative democracy that embraces all citizens, regardless of age or race. It exemplifies the vision of a government that is truly of the people, by the people, and for the people. I strongly urge you to pass this bill and take a decisive step towards strengthening our democracy.

Mussab Ali
Director Vote16USA

