

February 6 2024

Testimony on Lowering the Voting Age to 16 in Maryland School Board Elections
Position: Favorable

To the Ways and Means Committee of the Maryland General Assembly -

I am grateful for the opportunity to represent Common Cause and provide support for House Bill 373.

Across America, education is under attack and the people most impacted have not been given a seat at the table. From curriculum changes to school safety concerns, young people are having decisions made for them by boards that they do not select. Giving 16-year-olds the right to vote for the school board will allow them to have a board that truly represents their interests.

At Common Cause, we believe that civic engagement does not start at the age of eighteen, civic engagement begins in early stages of life and must be cultivated to ensure a representative democracy. Students who attend public high schools will begin learning civics in high school. Giving these students the opportunity to vote as early as sixteen in turn gives them the experiential learning of putting civic engagement into practice. With the experience of voting as young as sixteen, by the time these students have the ability to vote on a state and federal level at eighteen they will have already formed the habit of engagement with their community.

Common Cause supported the lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18 in 1971, an important step for our democracy and our country. Now, in 2024, Common Cause is committed to the empowerment of the next generation of leaders, and uplifting the voices of students in their schoolboard elections is an important step in this cause.

In its implementation it is also important to note that, if passed, the Maryland General Assembly, the Maryland boards of elections, and school boards should be making an investment into public outreach to ensure young voters are notified of their right to vote. If the concern is that sixteen-year-olds will not be likely to go out and vote, we need to be giving them equitable resources to understand how to register to vote and cast their ballot. This means working with Maryland public Schools and local boards of elections.

We urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,
Ari Franco
Youth Engagement Organizer
Common Cause