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**Senate Bill 31: Elections-Voter Registration and Voting-Age
Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee**

**Testimony from Adam Fogel
FairVote Right to Vote Director
8 February 2007**

Thank you for inviting me to testify about this bill and thanks to Senator Raskin and all the sponsors for introducing SB 31.

My name is Adam Fogel and I am the Right to Vote Director for FairVote-The Center for Voting and Democracy in Takoma Park. FairVote is a non-partisan, non-profit organization dedicated to fair elections where every vote counts equally and all voters are represented. The 100% Registration Project is part of our Right to Vote Initiative, where we advocate for full and accurate voter rolls that increase participation and limit the chance of fraud.

Implementing a uniform voter registration age of 16 will continue the progress Maryland has already made in bringing young people into the political process. Maryland already allows 17-year-olds to work as full-time election judges and encourages 16 and 17-year-olds to register to vote if they will be 18 before the next general election. Giving 16-year-olds the opportunity to advance-register is the first step in what should be the ultimate goal of developing a voting policy that reduces the burden placed on the individual and protects the system against the possibility of voter fraud.

Right now, voter registration is a largely partisan affair. National and state parties, as well as highly partisan organizations, devote vast resources to targeting specific demographic and geographic areas to register people with the greatest likelihood of voting for their party's candidates. Canvassers working for these parties or organizations are sometimes trained to coerce potential voters to register with a specific party. There have even been instances of these partisan organizations discarding forms of people who registered with the "wrong" party. Uniform advance-registration will give students an opportunity to be registered by their teachers, while they are still in high school. This non-partisan atmosphere will give students a real choice without being intimidated.

Another problem with the current registration system is that these partisan groups only care if people are registered every two or four years. From late August until three weeks before the election, county boards of election around the state are inundated with registration forms, many of which are filled out incorrectly. Partisan groups have been known to hold onto voter registration forms until days before the deadline, making it difficult for county boards to process all the forms in time for the election. Setting a uniform registration age at 16 will make voter registration a year-round activity, where county boards will no longer be burdened by last-minute rushes and prone to unintentional clerical mistakes.

Uniform advance registration will put the state of Maryland at the forefront of youth enfranchisement. A fully realized voting policy will ensure every Maryland student is both knowledgeable about his or her civic responsibility and on the voting rolls before graduation.

Thank you very much for your time and I urge you to pass this legislation.