

Senate Bill 92—Youth Voter Registration and Participation in Elections

Testimony by Adam Fogel FairVote Right to Vote Director

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Thank you for allowing me to testify in favor of S.B. 92—this important bill will help streamline the process of voter registration in Maryland and provide more young people with a chance to participate in the political process.

My name is Adam Fogel and I'm the Right to Vote Director at FairVote, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization based in Takoma Park. FairVote advocates for policies that ensure every young person, regardless of his or her parents' voting behavior or where they attend high school, has an opportunity to register to vote and learn the mechanics of participation.

Allowing 16-year-olds to pre-register to vote is the first step in what should be the ultimate goal of developing a voter registration system that reduces the burden placed on the individual and ensures security in the process.

This policy would allow all 16-year-olds to register to vote when applying for a driver's license, the same way voters over 18 can do now because of the National Voter Registration Act, or "motor voter." It also gives high schools the ability to conduct systematic, effective voter registration drives—something high schools cannot do now because of the inconsistency in the current voter registration age.

Another problem this policy will resolve is the last-minute rush of voter registration applications county boards of election receive before the voter registration deadline every election cycle. Partisan and nonpartisan voter registration groups that register thousands of new voters have been known to hold onto the forms until days before the deadline, making it difficult for the county boards to process all of the forms before the election. Setting a uniform registration age of 16 will make voter registration a year-round activity, where county boards will no longer be inundated with last-minute rushes and be forced to hire temporary, often inexperienced staff who could be prone to unintentional clerical mistakes.

As you know, over the past year there has been a good deal of confusion over who can and cannot vote in primary elections. This situation—involving the State Board of Elections, the Attorney General's office and ultimately the Maryland Court of Appeals—potentially disenfranchised tens of thousands of young Marylanders who were confused by administrative, legal and bureaucratic wrangling. Passing S.B. 92 will help restore confidence that this state's government cares about the participation of young people in the political process—especially those 17-year-olds who hoped to vote in the primary election on Tuesday, but were denied that right because of no fault of their own.

Setting a uniform voter registration age of 16 will put the state of Maryland at the forefront of youth voting rights. A fully realized voting policy will ensure every young person in Maryland is both knowledgeable about his or her civic responsibility and on the voting rolls before graduation.

Thank you very much and I urge your support for this legislation.