



Testimony of Project Vote in Support of HB/SB \_\_\_\_\_

[Committee]

[Date]

Project Vote submits the following comments in support of House/Senate Bill \_\_\_\_\_, the “High School Voter Registration Act.” Project Vote is a national nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that promotes voting in historically underrepresented communities. Through its research, advocacy, and direct legal services, Project Vote works to ensure that these constituencies are able to fully participate in American civic life by registering and voting.

Throughout the nation, one of the consistently underrepresented demographics, in terms of both registration rates and voter participation, is the youth population, or citizens between the ages of 18 and 30. In the United States in 2008, 18 to 24 year old citizens were registered at a rate of 12 percentage points lower than the general voting-eligible population, voting at a rate 15 points lower than the general voting-eligible population.<sup>1</sup> Research suggests that high school voter registration programs increase electoral participation among young people. The purpose of HB/SB \_\_\_\_\_ is to encourage voter registration by providing convenient registration opportunities to qualified high school students, encouraging people of all ages to vote and participate in government.

High school voter registration programs are a national trend with broad support. States, counties, and cities across the country have recognized the underrepresentation of youth in the U.S. electorate and have adopted laws, administrative rules, and mandates to increase youth electoral participation through high school voter registration programs. California, Florida, Vermont, Massachusetts and Rhode Island have implemented statewide high school voter registration programs.

The “High School Voter Registration Act” is likely to be successful in engaging the youth electorate. For instance, in Florida, county-level Supervisors of Elections have deemed current student voter registration and education programs “tremendously effective” in increasing voter registration and turnout. Since there are an estimated 3.8 million 18 year-old citizens in the United States, the impact of high school voter registration programs could be substantial.

One successful Ohio initiative is called “Grads Vote,” an “an effective and low-cost way” civically engage young people, according to Ohio Secretary of State, Jennifer Bruner. Nationwide, many have recognized the importance of registering students before they leave

---

<sup>1</sup> Current Population Survey, November 2008.



high school, because students may find it difficult to register while away at college, in the military, or while working. Experience from Vermont’s young people indicates that they are more likely to vote if they register before they leave high school.

Implementation appears to be most successful when there is a voter education component as well as coordination among election officials and school administrators. Therefore, the “High School Voter Registration Act” contemplates and delineates roles for all key players. HB/SB \_\_\_\_\_ requires the (*election clerk/appropriate official*) to contact each public high schools in the (*appropriate jurisdiction*). The legislation requires the (*election clerk/appropriate official*) to determine the number of high school students who are 18 or will reach the age of 18 during the academic year. The (*election clerk/appropriate official*) must then distribute a sufficient number of voter registration forms to each high school.

In concert with these activities, each public high school will conduct, at least once per school year and, at a minimum, eight weeks preceding a November election, a voter-education program to be held during school hours, for all students in grade 12 and all other students 18 years of age. The voter-education program will consist of several key components, including information about: (1) the process of voting, (2) the proper operation of voting machines, (3) polling location and time, and (4) the importance of voting.

Project Vote applauds Senator/Representative (*legislation sponsor*) for introducing this path-breaking legislation, and we urge swift passage. HB/SB \_\_\_\_\_ is a simple way of saying to (*state*)’s young voting-eligible population that their stake in their community is real and imminent. It also emphasizes the importance of engaging 18 to 24 year old citizens, a consistently underrepresented demographic. [Optional sentence]: Since \_\_\_\_ (*state*)\_\_ allows 18 year-olds to serve as poll workers, a position of trust and respect, it seems only fitting that these young citizens should be given the right to register their peers at their school, which is a convenient setting for voter registration to occur.