



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

[Committee]

[Date]

Project Vote submits the following comments in support of House Bill/Senate Bill \_\_\_\_\_, the “Preregistration for 16-and 17-year-olds” bill. Project Vote is a 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 demographic groups, in terms of both registration rates and voter participation, is citizens between the ages of 18 and 30. In the United States in 2008, 18-24 year old citizens were registered at a rate of 12 percentage points lower than the general voting-eligible population, and voted at a rate 15 points lower than the general voting-eligible population.<sup>1</sup>

Preregistration laws allow young people to preregister to vote before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, with the registration only taking effect upon turning 18. Thus, HB/SB \_\_\_\_\_ will allow 16- and 17-year-old citizens to preregister, but they will only be eligible to vote at age 18. Such laws have been shown in other states, such as Florida and Hawaii, to dramatically improve registration rates, and--even more importantly--to increase the likelihood that these young citizens will actually vote upon reaching voting age.<sup>2</sup> Since early 2010, more states have followed this growing trend of extending the franchise to young citizens, including Delaware, Maryland, and Rhode Island.

Preregistration can be implemented at low cost.<sup>3</sup> The only additional costs would be those involved in

- Making minor changes to the paper registration form and any online registration software;
- Informing local election officials of the change and providing updated materials; and
- Processing the additional voter registrations.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the low costs, the benefits of preregistration are great.

- Preregistration engages voters at an earlier age, yielding greater civic participation;

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

<sup>2</sup> Michael McDonald, *Voter Preregistration Programs*, available at [http://elections.gmu.edu/Preregistration\\_Report.pdf](http://elections.gmu.edu/Preregistration_Report.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See testimony of Ari Savitsky before the Rhode Island Senate, available at <http://archive.fairvote.org/ri/?page=2227>

<sup>4</sup> Based upon statistics from other states, we assume there will be additional registrations. However, it is also possible that the same number of registrations will be spread out over a longer period of time.



- Preregistration is more likely to take place at motor vehicle offices or online, reducing the likelihood of errors made on paper applications; and
- Promoting the use of electronic registration over paper would actually save money per registration.

Finally, one of the popular misconceptions about preregistration is that young people move around so frequently that their information would have to be updated immediately anyway, thereby making preregistration a wasted effort. However, mobility statistics don't bear this out. While 18 year olds may move slightly more than the general public, they move much less frequently than citizens in their mid-to-late 20s. Eighty-three percent of 18-year-old citizens remain at their current address for at least one year (as compared to 87% for the general voting-eligible population). Furthermore, preregistrations remain valid on the voter rolls at a rate similar to the general voting-eligible population. Based on a study of preregistration programs in Hawaii and Florida, preregistrations are purged at a rate only two percentage points higher than other new registrants.<sup>5</sup>

Project Vote applauds Representative/Senator \_\_\_\_\_ (legislative sponsor) \_\_\_\_\_ for introducing this path-breaking legislation, and we urge its swift passage. HB/SB \_\_\_\_\_ is a simple way of saying to 16- and 17-year-old citizens that their stake in their community is real and imminent. The minimal investment it will take to establish preregistration will more than pay for itself. Preregistration is, in reality, a safe and sound investment in the youth of \_\_\_\_\_ (state).

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<sup>5</sup> McDonald *op. cit.*

