



Testimony in Support of HB 1294
Youth Voter Registration
Senate Government Operations & Security
February, 25 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB1294. Project Vote is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to realizing the promise of American democracy. Our mission is to build an electorate that accurately represents the diversity of America's citizenry, and to ensure that every eligible citizen can register, vote, and cast a ballot that counts. Throughout the nation, younger citizens are a consistently underrepresented demographic group, in terms of both registration rates and voter participation. Preregistration is an important way to increase young voter engagement, while also increasing administrative efficiency.

Preregistration laws allow young people to preregister to vote before their 18th birthday, with the registration only taking effect upon turning 18. Such laws have been shown in other states to dramatically improve registration rates, and to increase the likelihood that these young citizens will vote upon reaching voting age.¹ Importantly, preregistration generally involves minimal costs, like making very minor changes to registration forms and registration databases.

Despite the low costs, the benefits of preregistration are great. In addition to engaging young voters, preregistration can increase accuracy and efficiency. Under HB 1294, preregistration is likely to take place at motor vehicle offices or online, thereby reducing the likelihood of errors made on paper applications and saving money per registration. Additionally, election officials are often inundated with new registrations close to an election. Preregistration allows more registration processing at a dispersed rate in advance, freeing up critical time for election officials during the busy election season.

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, preregistrations remain valid on the voter rolls at a rate similar to the general voting-eligible population.² A study of preregistration programs in Hawaii and Florida concluded that, contrary to popular belief, preregistered voters are *not* "transients who will disappear once they graduate from high school."³

Preregistration is a commonsense reform. Similar laws have garnered bipartisan support in other states.⁴ HB 1294 is a simple way of saying to young adults that their stake in the community is real and imminent, while also increasing election administration efficiency. Project Vote urges swift passage of this bill.

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¹ Michael McDonald & Matthew Thornburg, Registering the Youth Through Voter Preregistration, 13 N.Y.U.J. LEGIS. & PUB. POL'Y 551 (2010), *available at* <http://www.nyujlpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Michael-P.-McDonald-Matthew-Thornburg-Registering-the-Youth-Through-Voter-Preregistration.pdf>.

² *See id.* at 567.

³ *See id.*

⁴ A similar measure in Florida passed with overwhelming bipartisan support and was signed into law by a Republican governor. Likewise, Louisiana recently lowered pre-registration from 17 to 16 and mandated an automatic, opt-out system at the DMV. This measure passed and enjoyed unanimous support in the state senate.