

TO: The Honorable Michael Busch
Speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates

The Honorable Thomas Miller
President of the Maryland Senate

Voting is the most essential form of political expression and the right to do so is fundamental to an open democracy. Participation in elections underscores the legitimacy of our government and allows communities to express their intentions for their collective futures. Yet threats to this fundamental right continue to grow.

At the federal level, members of the Trump administration have signaled their intent to curtail access to voter registration by ordering the Department of Homeland Security to investigate unsubstantiated allegations of voter fraud made by the President. The administration has ordered the Department of Justice to switch sides at the Supreme Court, now supporting Ohio in their attempt to remove voters from the rolls simply for failing to vote in a single election cycle.

In Maryland, lawsuits have been filed against the State and Montgomery County election boards in a similar effort to remove voters from voting rolls more quickly. And alarmingly, despite the incredible interest and widespread coverage of the 2016 elections, turnout in Maryland as a percentage of the voting population was at its lowest in 24 years.

These realities exacerbate an already grim picture of United States elections, where older wealthier voters are much more likely to participate, thus heavily skewing policy outcomes away from the needs of younger, more mobile, and poorer Americans.

The General Assembly must meet these threats and negative trends head on by adopting policies like Election Day Registration and the Secure and Accessible Registration Act that modernize and increase participation in our elections. Both policies have been adopted in numerous states with bipartisan support and would help to create policy outcomes that are more reflective of Marylanders and their preferences.

Allowing for Election Day Registration would be a straightforward expansion of successful policy in Maryland. Currently, Marylanders can register to vote during the early voting period, but because of the wording of our constitution, that same policy is not available on Election Day. Nearly 20,000 Marylanders availed themselves of same day registration during the early voting period in 2016, meaning that 20,000 more Marylanders were able to make their voices heard during the course of the Primary and General elections. Giving voters the ability to also register on Election Day would only build on those gains.

The Secure and Accessible Registration Act (SARA), a form of Automatic Voter Registration, would work hand in hand with Election Day Registration to enhance access to voter registration by streamlining the registration process, seamlessly registering voters and updating voter registrations when Marylanders interact with certain agencies, such as the MVA, healthcare exchange, and local social service agencies. By reducing the input necessary from users and speeding up the interactions with these agencies, more Marylanders will become registered to vote rather than opting out. SARA would also expand upon the number of agencies offering full-fledged voter registration, helping to

address the decrease in young Americans' reliance on automobiles and driver's licenses, particularly in more densely populated areas.

Both Election Day Registration and policies like SARA have corresponded with greater voter participation where they have been adopted. Oregon, the first state to implement a similar registration system to SARA, experienced the highest increase in voter turnout in the country between 2012 and 2016. Oregon, the first state to implement a similar registration system, experienced the highest increase in voter turnout in the country between 2012 and 2016. About 100,000 of those registered under Oregon's program cast ballots in 2016, making up nearly 5% of the state's electorate. States that have implemented Election Day Registration documented 11% higher voter turnout on average in 2014 than states without the program.

The undersigned organizations strongly urge the Maryland legislature to adopt policies that reflect a changing electorate and will increase voter participation by passing [bill number TBD] in order to increase access to and participation in our democracy.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,