



Our Students Support the For The People Act, and We as Professors, Support Them

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Dear Members of the United States Senate,

As college professors who consider our teaching mission to include preparing the next generation for responsible democratic citizenship, we write to voice our support for the **For The People Act** (H.R.1 / S.1, hereafter S.1), which will directly benefit the civic education and engagement of young voters.

In recent years, young voters between the ages of 18 and 30 have demonstrated a higher level of democratic engagement than any generation during their youth in at least a century. In 2020, turnout among young voters (18-29) is estimated to have been 50%, an increase of eleven percentage points since 2016. This brought the gap between the youth turnout rate and the overall national rate to within ten percentage points, the lowest gap ever recorded in the United States.

This trend toward greater participation by youth is beneficial for many reasons. It ensures representation of their views and interests regardless of their party affiliation. It can also have a positive long-term impact on the community as young people develop a civic ethos that can lead to personally and socially responsible behavior. Further, participation by youth becomes a lifelong habit, fosters attachment to democratic institutions, and leads to other forms of responsible civic engagement. Evidence of the latter can be found in trends in youth public service that have coincided with increased youth voting rates. For example, Americans under 30 are running for office and signing up to serve as poll workers in record numbers. All of this bodes well for the future of American democracy. The more that youth see themselves in the democratic political system, the more they will work to preserve it.

Unfortunately, a wave of new state election bills introduced in 2021 threatens to slow and even reverse these positive trends in youth democratic engagement. [According to the Brennan Center for Justice](#), at least 361 state bills were proposed in 2021 that would make the process of voting more difficult. Bills would, for example, make voter registration less convenient, impose strict voter ID requirements, reduce options for early in-person voting, and reduce eligibility and/or opportunities for absentee voting. These types of restrictive policies make it more difficult to vote in general, but obstacles to voting tend to hit young and new voters the hardest.

In stark contrast to these state bills, S.1 would safeguard the ability for young people to vote and would likely promote a continuance of the positive trends in participation noted above.

• **Early and Absentee Voting.** S.1's provisions guaranteeing early voting and no-excuse absentee voting will reduce voting costs and therefore likely increase turnout across the board, especially among the

youth and other relatively low-resourced voters.

- **Voter Registration.** Difficulty navigating the process of registering to vote is a leading cause of lower turnout by new voters such as youth, and registration procedures are among the greatest sources of difficulty and confusion for voters. Fortunately, much research demonstrates that simplifying the registration process through measures such as same-day voter registration and online registration (both of which would be required under S.1) significantly increase voter turnout. Indeed, online registration has been shown to be particularly beneficial for the youth vote.
- **Pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds.** Also advantageous are state laws that allow minors to register prior to reaching voting age. Political scientists have shown that such pre-registration laws increase youth voter turnout when they are eligible to vote.

We thus strongly endorse S.1's registration modernization provisions, including automatic registration, same-day registration, online registration, pre-registration, and voter registration programming in high schools.

A recent analysis by Tufts University's Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement underscores just how much impact the election law reforms proposed by S.1 could have on youth voter turnout. Looking closely at state election laws across the country, they identified states that already have a majority of the electoral policies proposed by S.1 and states that have only a few of the policies. They found that youth turnout is 53% in states with four or more of the S.1 policies and only 43% in states with fewer than four of the policies.

Today's young voters need the opportunity to thrive not only now, but throughout their lives, as active participants in American constitutional democracy. S.1 will protect the youth vote and empower young voters to make their voices heard. We, the undersigned faculty, urge the Senate to pass S.1 immediately and promote a healthier democracy now and for the future.

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