



**Michigan House of Representatives
House Elections Committee
May 23, 2023**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 4569, regarding voter preregistration. Fair Elections Center is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to removing barriers to registration and voting through advocacy and impact litigation. The Center's Campus Vote Project educates and engages young voters on voting rights issues, working to institutionalize civic engagement and voting at university and college campuses, including in Michigan.

Preregistration permits otherwise-eligible citizens who are not yet of voting age to complete a voter registration application and automatically be added to the state's voter rolls when they turn eighteen—regardless of when the next election occurs or when their birthday falls. Such laws have been shown in other states to improve registration rates and to increase the likelihood that these young citizens will vote upon reaching voting age.¹ These laws prepare our young people for a future with fewer barriers to vote, expand opportunities for teens to organize in their communities, and assist students in developing early voting habits that will last a lifetime.

HB 4569 would permit eligible persons between the ages of sixteen and seventeen-and-a-half to preregister to vote. The bill would also ensure voter preregistration information is available at public high schools, and that the Secretary of State informs eligible graduated driver license or state identification holders of their right to preregister.

Under current law, only U.S. citizens in Michigan who are seventeen and a half years old, and who will be eighteen years old by Election Day, can register to vote. Young Michigan [voters](#) ages 18-29 had the highest turnout in their age group of any state in the 2022 midterm election according to a recent report by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement ([CIRCLE](#)), showing a passionate effort to make their voices heard. Yet Michigan voters over the age of 59 voted at double the rate of young people. Younger citizens are a consistently underrepresented demographic group throughout our nation, in terms of both registration rates and voter participation. More needs to be done to support future voters.

Preregistration is a crucial tool for increasing youth voter turnout by seamlessly adding them to the voter rolls and ensuring they receive important voting information in a timely manner. For example, election officials generally only provide information about precinct location changes or sample ballots to individuals who are already on the voter rolls.

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.nyuylpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Michael-P.-McDonald-Matthew-Thornburg-Registering-the-Youth-Through-Voter-Preregistration.pdf>.

Preregistration facilitates critical opportunities to provide voter registration services to young people in a centralized and coordinated way before they disperse to join the workforce or enroll in higher education. For example, preregistration at this age also facilitates voter registration efforts in high school, allowing high school registration efforts to deepen their potential reach. Preregistration also increases administrative efficiency. With preregistration, more registrations may be processed throughout the year, rather than close to the registration deadline, freeing up critical time for election officials during the busy election season.

A popular misconception about preregistration is that young people move around so frequently that their information would need to be updated before voting for the first time, thereby making preregistration a wasted effort. However, preregistered voters remain valid on the voter rolls at a rate similar to other registrants.² One study of preregistration programs in Hawaii and Florida, both states with 16-year old preregistration, concluded that, contrary to popular belief, preregistered voters are *not* “transients who will disappear once they graduate from high school.”³

Michigan should join the many states across the nation with preregistration and be a leader in helping young people vote. Meaningful engagement with students before they turn eighteen will help them learn about and ultimately participate in elections. Similar laws have garnered bipartisan support in other states.⁴ HB 4569 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. Fair Elections Center and its Campus Vote Project urge swift passage of this bill.

If you would like further information, please feel free to contact Michelle Kanter Cohen, Policy Director and Senior Counsel at Fair Elections Center, at mkantercohen@fairelectionscenter.org, or Landon Myers, Michigan State Coordinator for the Center’s Campus Vote Project, at lmeyers@campusvoteproject.org.

² Michael McDonald & Matthew Thornburg, Registering the Youth Through Voter Preregistration, 13 N.Y.U.J. LEGIS. & PUB. POL’Y 551, 557 (2010), *available at* <http://www.nyujlpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Michael-P.-McDonald-Matthew-Thornburg-Registering-the-Youth-Through-Voter-Preregistration.pdf>.

³ *Id.* at 567.

⁴ Preregistration in Florida passed with overwhelming bipartisan support and was signed into law by a Republican governor. Likewise, when Louisiana lowered the preregistration age from 17 to 16 at the office of motor vehicles, the measure passed with strong bipartisan support and enjoyed unanimous support in the state senate.