



**FOX CHAPEL AREA
SCHOOL DISTRICT**
COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

**Oral Testimony of
Luke J. Secosky
Fox Chapel Area High School**

**Before the
State Government Committee
Pennsylvania House of Representatives**

**Legislative Hearing on H.B. 520,
"An Act Amending Title 25 (Elections) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes"
March 14, 2008**

Ms. Chairman, members of the Committee: thank you for providing me the opportunity to be here. My name is Luke Secosky and I am a senior at Fox Chapel Area High School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I am pleased to appear before you today in support of House Bill 520, which would allow individuals who will be at least 18 years of age on the day of the next general or municipal election to register and vote in the corresponding primary.

Despite never having voted in an election, 2008 marks the second year in which I am volunteering for a political campaign. Some find this hard to believe, as many people unfairly assume young people are apathetic and indifferent when it comes to political affairs. Indeed, when canvassing neighborhoods for potential voters this past Sunday, I was asked on more than one occasion, "Are you doing this for school credit?" Unfortunately for my report card, there is no grade-based incentive for me to give of my time. The only reason I volunteer is because, simply put, I care enough to become involved. Though it may seem odd to some that I prefer CNN to ESPN and Washington Week to Best Week Ever, I am not alone in my views.

Nearly everyone in my high school has an opinion about the impending presidential election. Whether it be the increased media attention on the candidates or simply the fact that the next president will likely signal a new era in American government, it is impossible to ignore the political vibe that resonates inside the classrooms and hallways of my school.

Every day, the first ten minutes of my statistics class are invariably spent discussing current events. We talk about the presidential candidates, the war in Iraq, and government mandated standardized testing. There is no denying that politics is very important to young people. We are informed, intelligent citizens who place a high standard on civic participation. Why, then, should some of us be denied the right to vote in primary elections?

The burgeoning youth political movement is not something to be ignored. Our growing involvement in the democratic process illustrates that we are a voting bloc to be recognized and respected. States have seen record numbers of young voters in this year's primaries, and that trend will likely continue in Pennsylvania. If we can capitalize on the enthusiasm of the 2008

election by extending the right to vote in primary elections to those old enough to participate in the general contests, we can seize a group of voters for life. According to a report in the *American Journal of Political Science*, an individual's voting in a 1998 election raised the probability of him voting in the subsequent 1999 election by 46.7 percentage points.¹ In a year in which there have been record amounts of voters in well over half of all primary contests,² attracting new voters will have a significant impact on the future. Giving the vote to young people in this presidential election year will increase turnout in every election hereafter.

I am thankful that many of my friends care enough about politics to get involved with various campaigns. But at the same time, I am saddened that, due to current statutes regarding elections, some of them will not get a chance to vote in the primary election for the candidate they have worked tirelessly for. They are going above and beyond the expected civic duty, yet are denied of the most basic right of political involvement: the right to vote. While they ought to be commended for their volunteer work, they deserve the right to choose the candidate they wish to appear on the general election ballot. And with less than six weeks to go until the Pennsylvania primary election, it becomes more obvious with each passing day the difference a change in election law would make.

Today, on behalf of all young Pennsylvanians, I ask for our state to follow in the footsteps of nearly a dozen states that already permit individuals who will be at least 18 years of age by the general election to register and vote in the corresponding primary. I believe that our founding fathers, who set forth in this very city the basic precepts of our American government, would agree that each and every citizen ought to be able to choose and elect the officials who represent him or her. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is all we are seeking--fair and just participation in Pennsylvania's democratic system. Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

¹ Gerber, A., Green, D., Schachar R. *Voting May be Habit-Forming*. *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 2003, p. 540-550.

² Wolf, Richard. "Turnout prompts concerns for Nov.; Election officials ask for more machines." *USA Today* 29 Feb. 2008: 2A.