

Good morning! I would like to first of all thank the panel for allowing me to speak on this topic today. My name is Jessica Serdikoff, and I am a Senior at Cheltenham High School. I do not have any statistics for you; I do not take a class on politics or government. I am certainly not the most politically knowledgeable person in this room. I am just a student who supports House Bill 520. Its passage does not even affect me directly, as I turned eighteen last August, and have since already voted in an election, though admittedly for more local positions than those in next month's primary. Because of this, I do not support the bill because it upsets me that I will not have the opportunity to vote on April 22nd. I support it because I see my friends, some of whom are more politically active than I am, others less. I see them and hear what they have to say, and know that even the ones who do not read the New York Times everyday or join all of the politically oriented clubs, voice their concern for the incongruous decision to let them vote in November, but not six months earlier.

The primary is a way of narrowing options—of limiting our choices. The word “limitations” and the phrase “freedom to vote” do not necessarily sound like they should go together, but since citizens are the ones making their own limitations, it works. Well, until one takes into account the fact that not all citizens are able to participate in this early part of the election process. We are limiting the freedoms of those seventeen-year-olds who were born just a day, a week, a month too late, and asking them to endorse a candidate they may not have, had they been given the opportunity in April to cast a ballot of their own.

That being said, I do not think the responsibility ends with the passing of this bill. I have heard concerns regarding seventeen-year-olds and their maturity and

responsibility. Certainly, there comes an added incentive with this bill to educate the new voters, to expose them to the information they need to form solid opinions and choose a candidate to support based on more than a thought that “one has a nice smile” or “my friends all like this one.” I am involved in The 26 Program, a program that helps teach young students how to become active citizens. Much like the other programs mentioned here earlier today, it supports student advocacy, and shows them at a young age how to express their opinions. In my school, we are aiming it at the freshman class in the hopes of instilling in them a foundation for decision making, such as which presidential candidate to vote for when they are old enough to register and vote. Some students may not, at the moment, have enough information to cast a ballot maturely, but many do, and I think that all have the potential.