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TO: Members, House State Government Committee
FROM: Douglas E. Hill, Executive Director
SUBJECT: H.B. 520 – 17 Year Old Primary Vote
DATE: March 10, 2008

We apologize that scheduling difficulties preclude us from being able to present testimony before the Committee this Friday on HB 520, which would permit 17 year-olds who will turn 18 by the general or municipal election to vote for the relevant offices in the corresponding primary election. We would like to have this memo and commentary added to the record.

While we do not have a position regarding what the bill intends to accomplish, we do have several reservations and questions about the bill as currently drafted.

Referenda and Special Elections – Consistent with its intent, the bill should be more clear that a qualified 17 year old is permitted to vote only for the offices that will appear in the subsequent general or municipal election, and is barred from voting on any referenda or special elections (e.g. legislative vacancies) appearing on the primary ballot that will have a final binding result. To do otherwise would, in our estimation, violate the Constitutional provisions regarding eligible voting age.

Equipment Lock-Out / Special Ballots – Presuming that 17-year-olds will be ineligible to vote on some offices or questions the primary ballot, we understand on an anecdotal basis that our counties' electronic election systems can accommodate this type of lockout, which is comparable to the lockout that we now do (albeit in the reverse) for independent voters in the primary. For counties with paper-based systems (e.g. optical scan), printing a specially-qualified ballot face will not be a problem. In each case, however, counties will incur some additional time and expense in ballot preparation.

Elector Registration – There will need to be updates to the Statewide Uniform Registry of Electors to allow us to enter pre-primary registrations of those who will not be 18 by the date of the primary, but limited only to those who will be 18 by the date of the general election.

Poll Books -- Poll-book printing from the SURE system will need to have a clear means to indicate the 17 year old voters so that poll workers can make the appropriate lock-out, or hand out the appropriate ballot, when they enter the polling booth.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. Please contact us if you have questions or need additional information.