



Easton Area High School

Hello Chairperson, members of the committee, and everyone else who was gracious enough to attend today: My name is Michael Manchester, and I am a senior here at Easton Area High School. I would first like to say that I feel much honored to be here before all of you today. It's wonderful that we can all get together in a positive environment and discuss these issues. That being said, I am proud to say that I sit here before you in full support of House Bill 520 and the effect that it will have on primary elections and certain voters in Pennsylvania.

First I'd like to address the question of the necessity of this bill. When I talked to certain teachers as well as my parents, I received the "bigger fish to fry" answer when it came to the need for such a law. This issue of voter age is not at the top of most citizens' political to-do lists. However, I feel that being allowed to freely choose our electors when we become adults is a fundamental democratic characteristic of the American system of government. These issues are the issues that must be dealt with before we can complete any of the other steps of the democratic process.

When we decide an issue like that of House Bill 520, we must look at some of the history behind it. While the founders of the United States certainly did not plan for only a two party government, our country currently sits in a two party system. Therefore, our representatives are no longer chosen in single day elections. Narrowing the field of the candidates for a political party in a primary election has become an essential process in eventually electing a viable candidate for office. Thus, our general elections and primary elections are tied hand in hand, and just as you cannot have one without the other, you cannot have separate sets of voters choosing these candidates.

I think what many people do not understand is that an Election Days is meant to be treated as if we are electing a candidate on a *single* day. Because of the time required by primary elections as well as the campaign process, we cannot feasibly have primaries and general elections on the same day. However, we must still treat each election season as if we were electing a candidate on a single day. Therefore, we must also assess the *ages* of eligible voters as if they were electing a candidate on a single day, which means that we must treat voters who will be eighteen in general elections as if they are eighteen for the primary elections. Disallowing those seventeen year olds who will be eighteen by the general elections from voting in primaries is nothing more than disenfranchising a select group of the voting populace.

I have heard a number of concerns about this bill and I'd like to address them as well. Many people have been questioning this bill by using the "snowball effect" excuse. They claim that allowing seventeen year olds to vote is only the first step – next year the voting age will drop sixteen, then fourteen, then twelve, et cetera. But I would like to point out that this bill sets a clear cut limit for voting – it is not trying to move the voting age back at all, it simply serves to extend the current voting age to all elections. This will then finally allow eligible voters to partake in all parts of an election season, as they should legally be allowed to.

Another concern about this bill is that it will advance a certain political party. I, sitting before you as a right wing Libertarian vying for a Democratic bill, completely disagree. Even the most astute political scientists would have a difficult time determining which party this bill would benefit most. If we use history as a guide and take a look at laws like the “motor-voter” laws, we can see that many times legislation, especially legislation honed in on the voting process, does not aid the party we think it will at all. Therefore, the question of this bill favoring a certain party becomes a moot point.

On a more personal note, I’ve spent four wonderful years in this very high school and I’ve seen so many kids with deep passions for politics. I’ve been involved in the Junior States of America, the Debate Team, and Mock Trial, all organizations where we delve deeply into the structures of America’s political system. We are students fresh out of economics, government, and history courses who understand politics better than many adult voters. Just a few weeks ago, Bill Clinton stopped in here in our Gymnasium to present a speech in support of Hillary. Some students came to watch, some to cheer, and even some to protest. We have students going to military colleges with political aspirations and heavily political universities next year, for example, next year I myself will be in the heart of the political sphere at Georgetown University.

Most students here care a great deal about the upcoming election – from Obama pins to McCain bumper stickers, to anti-Hillary T-shirts, I’ve seen it all here. And I single out Democrats here, but it is simply not fair to allow members of the Democratic Party to choose between a Democrat and Republican in November but not allow them to choose *which* Democrat will be on that ticket in November. In many ways, this prevents many Democrats from ever really choosing who they would want to be the next president. And that process has been given another name – disenfranchisement.

I’m sure there are a great number of stipulations and current laws that would refute this, but if we step back and remove ourselves from the political bubble for one moment and assess this situation with pure logic, it only makes sense to change the current restrictions. Fair elections are an integral part of the structure of the Constitutional Republic that is our government, and in many ways elections seem to have become unfair and unjust. It is time that we begin to take a stand to ensure justice in every aspect of our elections, and bills like House Bill 520 are the first step in that long and arduous process.

Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen.