

STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS

P.O. BOX 6486, ANNAPOLIS, MD 21401-0486 PHONE (410) 269-2840

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Deputy Administrator

17 YEAR OLDS CAN VOTE IN THE PRIMARY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Ross Goldstein
410-269-2877

Annapolis, Maryland (December 20, 2007) – At its December 20th meeting, the Maryland State Board of Elections reached a unanimous decision to follow the advice of Attorney General Douglas Gansler to implement Maryland law as it has in the past - by registering and allowing a 17 year old who will be 18 on or before the next succeeding general or special election to vote in a primary election. Previous advice from Mr. Gansler's office had determined that 17 year olds could not vote in primary elections. However, his recent advice stated that the associational rights of the political parties, as guaranteed by the First Amendment, allows the parties to determine whether a 17 year old who will be 18 by the next succeeding general election may vote in the party's primary. Both the Maryland Democratic and Republican Parties have explicitly stated that a 17 year old registered with the party may vote in that party's primary election.

To implement the decision to allow eligible 17 year olds to vote and to ensure that 17 year olds who will be 18 on or before the next general or special election know that they have the right to register and vote in the upcoming Presidential Primary Election, the State Board will take the following actions:

1. Inform all 17 year olds who have previously submitted voter registration applications that they are now active registered voters who are eligible to vote in the primary election of the party with which they are affiliated;
2. Inform the 24 local boards of elections of the State Board's decision so they can ensure that all future voter registration applications submitted by 17 year olds will be accepted;
3. Request that Nancy Grasmick, State Superintendent of Schools, provide assistance with ensuring that 17 year olds in State schools are aware that they can register and vote in the upcoming Presidential Primary Election if they will be 18 on or before the general election; and
4. Request that the political parties work towards getting 17 year olds to register to vote.

The 2008 Presidential Primary Election will be held on Tuesday, February 12, 2008. The deadline to register to vote in this election is Tuesday, January 22, 2008. Voter registration applications are available at www.elections.state.md.us.