



## **Student Association for Voter Empowerment**

### **Initiative:**

Passing the *Student Voter Opportunity to Encourage Registration Act (Student VOTER Act)*, a federal bill conceived of by SAVE members and introduced in Congress by Representatives Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) and Steven LaTourette (R-OH), as well as Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL).

### **Background:**

- Despite recently encouraging increases, voter turnout among young Americans remains significantly lower than participation among older generations.
- The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), or “Motor Voter Act,” requires state and local governments to offer voter registration to citizens when they obtain a driver’s license or public assistance benefits.
- Empirical evidence indicates that voter registration is the greatest hurdle to young voter participation. According to a 2004 study by CIRCLE, 32% of 18-29 year olds who did not participate in the election did so because of uncertainties in the registration process.
- According to the same CIRCLE study, 30% of 18-29 year olds registered to vote at the Department of Motor Vehicles, which is by far the most common source of registration.
- In the Higher Education Act of 1998, Congress required universities to make a “good faith effort” to offer voter registration to students, but only 40% are in compliance according to a 2004 Harvard University study.
- Student voters are historically independent. In a 2005 Harvard University study, 38% of college students across America self-identified as independents, 33% as Democrats, and 25% as Republicans.

### **Summary:**

- The Student VOTER Act amends the NVRA to designate colleges and universities as “voter registration agencies.” The legislation would require all colleges and universities that receive federal funds to offer voter registration to students during “enrollment for a course of study.”
- The legislation will result in minimal administrative and cost burden to the schools involved. For example, schools are required to have the forms available already. Alternatively, programs may be implemented using electronic systems, which will minimize long-term costs. Finally, work-study students are a potential resource for any labor costs, considering that they are required to serve their schools already.
- CBO will not provide a cost estimate for the bill because they view voting as a constitutional right, and their policy is not to provide cost estimates for bills involving such rights.