

Testimony of Jacqueline Vi

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Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and Members of this Committee. I am honored to have the opportunity to appear before this Committee to discuss college student voting. My statement will be brief because I think this issue is simple: college students should be given all the information they need to make well-informed decisions about where and how to vote.

My name is Jacqueline Vi, but my friends call me Jackie. I am 18 years old, and a freshman at American University, majoring in International Relations. I hope to one day work for the State Department, hopefully in an embassy overseas.

My feelings about voting as a college student come from my basic belief that with the right to vote comes responsibility. As a young adult voting for the first time, I feel it is important to be aware of whom and what one is voting for on Election Day. Voting is a sacred right, and democracy works best when voters know about what is going on in the world, and in their communities. At this Committee's hearing yesterday, many of the witnesses talked about the importance of educated voters, and I think they are right. Part of the college experience, in addition to learning math, science, and history, is learning how to think for ourselves, and how to make adult decisions. I think that the issue of voting is a perfect example of what I mean.

I am from Lakewood, California, which is in California's 39th Congressional District, represented by Congresswoman Linda Sanchez. In March of this year, one month before my eighteenth birthday, I registered to vote. And as a legal resident of California, I feel that my vote would be better served in the community where I have lived for most of my life, and which I remain tied to because my family still lives there. For example, in the upcoming election, California's Proposition 6, also known as the Safe Neighborhoods Act, will be on the ballot. Prop 6 would take away state funding from education and direct it toward eliminating bail and increasing penalties for several crimes. As a former student in the public school system, I believe that the money would be better spent on bettering the education system rather than paying for longer jail time for criminals. I know that several Members of this Committee are also from

California – Mr. McCarthy, Ms. Lofgren, and Mrs. Davis. And whether you support or oppose Prop 6, I am sure that just because you spend a lot of time here in Washington D.C., like I do, that doesn't mean that you don't want to be able to vote on this proposition on Election Day.

Many students like me choose to keep their legal residence at home because we feel connected to the place where we grew up. For students like us, we believe that we should vote for elected officials who represent the community of our legal residence, and vote on issues that impact the place that we consider home. I don't know where I will live after graduation, but I know that right now my home is still California.

However, in order to be able to vote as Californian, I have to vote absentee. I do not believe that just because I will physically be in Washington D.C. on November 4th that I should vote in Washington D.C., especially because I am more like a visitor than a resident of the city. I know that decisions made by the local government in Washington D.C. may have an impact on me, but I have a California drivers' license, and in my heart I know that I am a Californian.

I know that every state has different rules about how to vote absentee, and that it is easier to do in California than in some other states, like Virginia. But I still managed to register and request an absentee ballot without any problems. First, I went to the post office to get a voter registration application. It only took a few minutes to fill out. I mailed it back to the elections board, and they mailed me a confirmation. After that, requesting an absentee ballot only took one phone call. I expect my ballot to arrive at my address here in Washington D.C. sometime this week.

I know that some people say that it's too complicated for students to request an absentee ballot, but I think that's just an excuse for laziness. Sure, it would be much easier to roll out of bed on Election Day, and then think about voting, rather than planning in advance to vote absentee, but I don't think that kind of an attitude is the right one for our nation's young people.

Shouldn't we strive to develop civic pride and awareness in college students? After all, aren't they the future of this country? Plus, these days people move all around the country more frequently than our parents' generation did, for jobs or other reasons, and we will need to know how to register to vote in a new city or town. What better time to teach young people these important lessons than in college?

I'd like to thank the committee for listening to my testimony and I really appreciate the Committee's interest in the importance of student voting rights. In addition, I want to thank you

for giving me the opportunity to participate in this hearing – not many college freshmen can say that they have testified before the U.S. Congress on an issue that directly impacts college students. I will never forget this experience.

I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.