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EDUCATION Elementary and Secondary Education: Require Secondary Public Schools to Notify Students Who Are Eligible of Their Right to Register to Vote and to Offer Such Students the Opportunity to Register to Vote at the School During the Month of April of Each Year

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EDUCATION

Elementary and Secondary Education: Require Secondary Public Schools to Notify Students Who Are Eligible of Their Right to Register to Vote and to Offer Such Students the Opportunity to Register to Vote at the School During the Month of April of Each Year

CODE SECTION:	O.C.G.A. § 20-2-310 (amended)
BILL NUMBER:	HB 372
ACT NUMBER:	219
GEORGIA LAWS:	2001 Ga. Laws 743
SUMMARY:	The Act requires secondary public schools to notify eligible students of their right to register to vote and to offer such students the opportunity to register to vote at school during the month of April of each year.
EFFECTIVE DATE:	July 1, 2001

History

Valencia Seay, the freshman representative from the 93rd House District, authored this legislation.¹ The idea grew out of her experience in serving on the Clayton County Board of Education.² As an educator and as a parent of her own high school-aged children, she began to realize that registering to vote was not a priority for seventeen- and eighteen-year-old students.³ In Clayton County, even those students who were motivated to register had to travel to the county seat—miles from many of their homes—in order to do so.⁴ As a member of the school board, Representative Seay requested that the Clayton County School System implement an annual voter registration day at school for students in that district.⁵

1. See Telephone Interview with Rep. Valencia Seay, House District No. 93 (Apr. 3, 2001) [hereinafter Seay Interview].

2. See *id.*

3. See *id.*

4. See *id.*

5. See *id.*

Clayton County did implement the plan, and Representative Seay received positive feedback from many young people in the community.⁶ For example, one college freshman, home for spring break, called Representative Seay to thank her for requesting the registration day.⁷ The student then told Seay of her excitement about voting for the first time.⁸ Seay also heard from students in Clayton County whose parents were motivated to register to vote for the first time when their students' registration cards arrived in the mail.⁹ As a result of the positive feedback in Clayton County, Seay wanted to use her recently-won legislative seat to implement the program statewide.¹⁰

Previously, some schools in educational systems outside of Clayton County provided voter registration forms in the guidance counselor's office throughout the school year.¹¹ However, as Representative Seay discovered, the forms were not available in all schools.¹² This bill was introduced to provide a consistent, state-wide emphasis on both educating eligible young people regarding their right to vote and providing accessible means to register for those who are interested.¹³ Of course, any student who does not wish to register is free to decline the opportunity; the choice is left to the student.¹⁴

HB 372

Representatives Valencia Seay, Sharon Beasley-Teague, Georganna Sinkfield, Mitchell Kaye, and Larry Walker of the 93rd, 58th, 57th, 37th, and 141st Districts, respectively, sponsored HB 372.¹⁵ Upon the introduction of HB 372 on February 2, 2001, the House assigned the bill to the Government Affairs Committee.¹⁶ The Committee favorably reported the bill on February 14, 2001, after making a few minor

6. *See id.*

7. *See id.*

8. *See id.*

9. *See id.*

10. *See id.*

11. *See* Audio Recording of House Proceedings, Feb. 21, 2001 (remarks by Rep. Valencia Seay), at <http://www.state.ga.us/services/leg/audio/2001archive.html> [hereinafter House Audio].

12. *See* Seay Interview, *supra* note 1.

13. *See* House Audio, *supra* note 11 (remarks by Rep. Valencia Seay).

14. *See id.*

15. *See* HB 372, as introduced, 2001 Ga. Gen. Assem.

16. *See* State of Georgia Final Composite Status Sheet, HB 372, Mar. 21, 2001.

substitutions.¹⁷ The House passed the bill by a vote of 155 to 3 on February 21, 2001.¹⁸

On February 22, the Senate assigned the bill to its Education Committee, which favorably reported the bill, as introduced, on March 13, 2001.¹⁹ The Senate adopted and unanimously passed the bill on March 14, 2001, without discussion or change.²⁰ Governor Roy Barnes signed the bill into law on April 26, 2001.²¹

The Act

The Act amends Code section 20-2-310 to require that secondary public schools notify eligible students of their right to register to vote and to offer such students the opportunity to register to vote at school during the month of April of each year.²² The Act does not require students to register to vote, nor does it abolish existing practices at those schools which make voter registration forms available throughout the school year for students who wish to register.²³

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17. *See id.* Compare HB 372, as introduced, 2001 Ga. Gen. Assem., with HB 372 (HCS), 2001 Ga. Gen. Assem. The substitution merely changed the language of the bill so that it would apply to "eligible" students rather than students who were at least eighteen years old, and provided for registration during the entire month of April rather than only the first week. Compare HB 372, as introduced, 2001 Ga. Gen. Assem., with HB 372 (HCS), 2001 Ga. Gen. Assem.

18. *See* Georgia House of Representatives Voting Record, HB 372 (Feb. 21, 2001); House Audio, *supra* note 11 (voting).

19. *See* State of Georgia Final Composite Status Sheet, HB 372, Mar. 21, 2001.

20. *See* Georgia Senate Voting Record, HB 372 (Mar. 14, 2001); Audio Recording of Senate Proceedings, Mar. 14, 2001 (remarks by Sen. Terrell Starr), at <http://www.state.ga.us/services/leg/audio/2001archive.html>.

21. *See* 2001 Ga. Laws 743, § 2, at 744.

22. Compare 1987 Ga. Laws 1169, § 1, at 1286-87 (formerly found at O.C.G.A. § 20-2-310 (2000)), with O.C.G.A. 20-2-310 (2001).

23. *See* O.C.G.A. § 20-2-310 (2001); *see also* House Audio, *supra* note 11 (remarks by Rep. Valencia Seay).