



Isabela Villarreal
RE: Support Our Future, Our Vote - HJR 20

February 21st, 2023

Chair Fahey, Vice-Chairs Breese-Iverson and Kropf, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Isabela Villarreal and I am the Policy and Communications Director at Next Up Action Fund. As an organization that builds political power with young people, our work and our communities face a glaring issue: 16 and 17-year-olds currently have no say in who will best represent their values and priorities even though they will be disproportionately bear the brunt of decisions. This is why we strongly support HJR 20, which proposes an amendment to the Oregon Constitution to lower the voting age from 18 years old to 16 years old.

Lowering the Voting Age to 16 is one of Next Up Action Fund's priority issues. We first introduced the constitutional measure in 2019, and then in the 2021 legislative session, we re-introduced that bill along with a bill allowing 16 and 17 year olds to vote in school district elections. We are excited to see these concepts being reintroduced once again because we know civic habits are more likely to stick when developed at a younger age.

To ground us, I want us to remember that the voting age wasn't always 18. It wasn't until the 26th Amendment was ratified in 1971 did the U.S. extend the right to vote to 18 year olds by lowering the federal voting age from 21. A clear next step is to lower the voting age to 16, as it is consistent with the values of our democracy and will help to ensure that the voices of young people are heard and represented in our government. Today, you'll hear from many young people about why it's critical that they are able to become more engaged in the political process.

This has been implemented in the U.S. Two Maryland cities have successfully extended municipal voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds. In 2013, Takoma Park 16- and 17-year-olds voted at twice the rate of voters 18 and older.¹ Residents also support the measure: In an exit poll of an April 2014 Takoma Park special election,

¹ <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/solid-turnout-teen-voters-local-election>

72% of participants supported keeping voting rights for 16- and 17-year-olds in city elections.²

Research shows that 16- and 17-year-olds have the necessary civic knowledge, skills, and cognitive ability to vote responsibly. 16-year olds actually have ‘cold cognition’, a thought out decision making process in which they can perform just as well as adults, and are often treated the same as adults by the government, such as needing to pay taxes, eligibility to drive, and even be tried for crime as adults.³

16 and 17-year-olds are more than ready to vote. They are not just a passive demographic in our communities; they possess their own, well-informed opinions on topics the same as any adult, and are active members. It’s time for us to re-evaluate the responsibility that youth hold, and realize they have been ready for more.

I urge you all to pass HJR 20.

Thank you,

Isabela Villarreal

Policy and Communications Director

² <https://fairvote.org/fairvote-survey-shows-support-for-takoma-park-voting-reforms/>

³ <https://vote16usa.org/developmental-science-supports-lowering-the-voting-age-to-16/>