

Alfred H. Kurland

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RE: The Student Voice and Democracy Act

Support HB 3012

House Committee Rules

Chair Bowman; Vice Chair Drazen;

Vice Chair Pham and members of

The House Committee on Rules

My name is Alfred H. Kurland, and I am a volunteer coordinator for Vote 16 New York City- New York State. We are part of a coalition of civic reform and youth service agencies, such as Generation Citizen and Y Vote NY, who are collaborating to create platforms of intergenerational civic relationships where all voices are heard and respected, and where decision making is a shared enterprise which benefits the common good. We are advocating for passage of pending NY State Legislation, which once enacted would extend the right to vote to 16-and 17-year -olds in New York City and New York State elections.

I am writing to testify in strong support of the Student Voice and Democracy Act, HB 3012, which would allow registered 16-and-17-year-olds to vote in local school board elections, giving students a voice in their education and strengthening our democracy. In New York City, programs such as the Public Agenda/Youth Agenda (co-sponsored by Y Vote NY and the CUNY School of Professional Studies) have recruited and organized high school student led advocacy campaigns. Students learn to debate, dialogue, research and critique on issues of vital concern to them, such as the need to provide equitably distributed resources to all schools, the desire to expand internship and entry level career opportunities, and the benefits of expanding positive cultural understanding and improved school climate. Student activists construct summaries of findings and recommendations to NYC elected officials and representatives of New York City agencies such as the

Department of Education and the Department of Youth and Community Development. One outcome has been the construction of ongoing dialogue which contributes to youth developing buy-in to the democratic process, and adult leaders forming deeper understanding about young people's constructive assets and the value of their civic contributions. In her formative years as a civic reformer, the former first lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, in a speech delivered to the United Nations, suggested that when participation and civic collaboration are introduced on local stages, a foundation is built upon which appreciation for the value of electoral participation on larger stages becomes supported.

In my 30 years of leading programs which supported teen-led advocacy and decision-making, I have witnessed the community-side and citywide effects of promoting intergenerational collaboration and civic partnerships. Where dialogue and joint decision making have been honored and institutionalized, I have seen abandoned parks converted to beautifully accessible public spaces, I have seen school lunch menus changed to promote healthier foods, and I have seen youth from diverse cultures learn to communicate and collaborate in the process of improving school climate and community safety. I believe that by granting the right to vote for 16-and-17-year-olds on a local level, including that of become influencers with public school policy, we are building a community organizing to electoral participation pipeline, where the ballot box becomes a source of bonding across the generational divide.

Sincerely,



Alfred H. Kurland

Vote 16 New York City- New York State <https://vote16nyc-nys.com>

Author: The Soul of Adolescence Aligns with the Heart of Democracy: Orphans, Rebels and Civic Lovers Unite <https://alfredhurlandbooks.com>

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