

City of Cambridge

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, RULES
AND CLAIMS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Councillor Jim Braude, Chair
Councillor Henrietta Davis
Vice Mayor David P. Maher
Councillor Michael A. Sullivan
Councillor Timothy J. Toomey, Jr.*

~~In City Council March 19, 2001
Committee Report #7
In City Council April 2, 2001
Calendar Item #5~~

AMENDED REPORT

The Government Operations, Rules and Claims Committee held a public hearing on November 16, 2000, beginning at 5:50 o'clock p.m. in the Sullivan Chamber for the purpose of considering a proposal to petition the legislature to lower the voting age to enable 16 and 17 year-old residents to vote in City Council and School Committee elections.

Present at the hearing were Councillor Jim Braude, Chair of the Committee, Mayor Anthony D. Galluccio, Vice Mayor David P. Maher, Councillor Kathleen L. Born, Councillor Henrietta Davis, Councillor Marjorie C. Decker, Councillor Michael A. Sullivan, Councillor Timothy J. Toomey, Jr., and City Clerk D. Margaret Drury.

Councillor Braude convened the hearing and explained the purpose. He made introductory remarks and invited Mayor Galluccio, who had to leave to chair a meeting of the School Committee, to begin.

Mayor Galluccio stated that the petition is part of a far-reaching goal to involve youth. The Kids Council is voting tonight on a proposal to add youth members to the council. He voiced his support for the proposal for 17 year-olds to vote and said he was not quite sure about 16 year-olds. For 17 year-olds, it is important to get them involved while they are still at the high school.

Councillor Decker welcomed the students in attendance and urged them to stay involved in the political process regardless of the outcome.

Councillor Born said that she was skeptical about the proposal until she talked to students who were persuasive in their argument that this will help to get young people in the habit of voting while they are still in their home environment.

Councillor Braude then moved to public testimony.

David "Max" Prum, 100 Thorndike Street, age 14, spoke in support of the proposal. He stated that voter apathy is a big problem in America. One way to combat that apathy is to lower the voting age so voting can be discussed at school.

Emma Lang, 4 Forest Street, stated that the proponent students collected approximately 300 signatures in support of lowering the voting age.

Councillor Braude asked Ms. Lang about the “trickle up” theory: Will allowing youth to vote result in their parents voting too? Ms. Lang answered that she believes it would.

George Goverman, Cambridge, spoke in opposition to the proposal. He stated that he is a former Election Commissioner and has done a great deal of work on elections. This decision to lower to voting age will have a ripple effect in lowering the age limit for all sorts of activities, such as drinking, driving, etc. If kids can vote at age 16, why can they not buy tobacco? The proper inquiry when talking about enfranchising a class based on age is what are the ages at which society judges the class as a whole capable of adult decisions. He suspects all of the youth present are qualified to vote in terms of their maturity, but when the question is enfranchising a class, one needs to keep in mind the worst members of the class. He envisions the character Francis in “Malcolm in the Middle.”

Councillor Braude said that by that “worst in the class” standard, one could make a good argument for disenfranchising everyone in America.

Lalika Lewis, Boston, attends the Fenway School, age 16, and her girlfriend, Ebony, Dorchester, age 15, stated that they are members of the Boston Area Youth Organizing Project (YOP). Teenagers work, pay taxes, and have many adult responsibilities. They urged support for the proposal.

David Smith, age 14, 955 Massachusetts Avenue, stated that they are not trying to change age limits for other activities, just the voting age, because these can be a part of high school education. Schools will take a bigger role in educating kids about voting, and more kids will become voting citizens as they get older.

Camille Spivey, age 17, Mattapan, stated that she attends Dorchester High School, and added that it is important for youth to be connected to their community.

Caleb Vosel, 15 Beech Street, said that the basic issue is whether 16 year-olds should have input into decisions that affect them. Sixteen year-olds pay income taxes and drive cars. They have attained the minimum required education and can choose whether to leave school or continue.

Jonathan Bruderlein, age 14, Lancaster Street, said that he is in his junior year at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School. He got involved with this issue when he was walking down the street, saw lights in the sky, found out it was the millennium light show and thought there were better ways for Cambridge to spend its money. Allowing 16 and 17 year-old people to vote would decrease voter apathy.

Councillor Braude asked why not extend the vote to 14 year-olds. Mr. Assad said that not all juniors are ready. By age 16 you have gone through a couple of years of high school.

Assad Sayed, 312 Evereteze Way, spoke in support of the proposal. Youths are part of this country too.

Noah Chevalier, age 15, 21 Goldstar Road, analogized the issue to the drinking age. In Europe kids are allow to drink from an early age and there is very little irresponsible drinking by teenagers. Here, the situation is just the opposite. "Francis" is no more real than Homer Simpson. Obviously neither should vote.

Jannasse Jean, 199 Prospect Street, stated that 16 year-olds should have the right to vote. The decisions made affect their lives, especially for School Committees.

Ben Somberg, age 17, 48 Antrim Street, said that this proposal would affect 1500 people at any given time. If that group were energized to vote, it could make a difference. Restructuring at CRLS, parks, the library are all issues that affect 16 and 17 year-olds. The proposed change also would make the elected officials accountable to a group of people they have never needed to listen to before. He stressed that it is important for youth to get at least one chance to vote while still in high school.

Councillor Braude asked Mr. Somberg how he would feel about limiting the vote to age 17 and above. Mr. Somberg said that he would prefer that the current proposal not be changed, but he would support it as amended to 17 year-olds. The key is getting one vote while still at high school.

Jesse Bayer, age 16, Poplar Road spoke in support of the proposal. Sixteen year-olds should be included because elections are only held every two years, so half of the students would not be able to vote in high school if the vote were limited to 17 year-olds. He also noted that there are plenty of immature adults.

Gerald Berger, 52 Elm Street, age 56, stated that a number of people have been working on lowering the voting age for quite some time. The Area 4 Task Force supports this proposal. The Ward 3 Democratic Committee endorsed this position, as did the Democratic City Committee. He described the thinking of the Democratic City Committee in deciding to support this position. The children of today are not the same as we were. Many studies indicate that cognitive abilities, etc. have matured sufficiently at age 16 to enable a new level of responsibility. Sixteen years-olds drop out of school, have consensual sex, are sentenced to life without parole. This proposal ensures one vote before they graduate. We cannot accept the status quo with regard to the current lack of voter participation. In 1992, 40% of registered voters went to the polls.

Councillor Braude voiced concern that since 18 year-olds were given the right to vote in 1972, after an initial spurt, young voters' participation has been dropping.

Councillor Davis said that there is no one panacea for the low voting rate. We have to make it easier for people to vote.

David Gottlieb, 309 Washington Street, Brighton, said that the youth of Cambridge and Boston should be able to decide on school format and on other issues that affect them. If youth are allowed to vote, adults will be able to connect to youth and will be more respected by them.

Artis Bergman, 82 Elm Street, age 17, a senior at CRLS, urged the Council to keep in mind that the decisions made by elected officials affect youth, for example, open space, police, resources. He added that this proposal addresses voter apathy; it would excite youth and draw them in. It would create a process for easing young adults into the voting system, while they are still in the structure of learning. Sixteen is a defined age of responsibility and will allow all youth a chance to vote while still in school.

Gideon Weissman, age 14, 26 Chalk Street, a freshman at CRLS, said that if kids can vote, they will be more interested in voting.

Hanna Jacofsky, age 16, 220 Broadway, stated that sixteen is the year when angst begins, and sixteen is the year when students take American History. The current restriction is like the American Revolution, the students are colonies, the City Council and School Committee are Britain. She added that the risk you run with democracy is that some unintelligent people will vote. By the time kids get out of high school they are so used to not being listened to, that of course they don't vote.

Evan Rausch, Chair, Democratic City Committee, spoke in support. The Democratic City Committee passed a resolution in support by an overwhelming majority. It is ridiculous that 18 year-old college students can vote for City Councillors after being here for two months while CRLS students who have lived here all their lives cannot.

Anim Steel, age 20, Cambridge, 29 Pleasant Street, said that he is inspired and engaged by the activism of young people. Research studies by the major foundations are finding that the process of teaching civics works best as an active process.

Janice Lee, Boston Area Youth Organizing Association, 29 Pleasant Street, stated that she has worked with the group. The students chose this issue themselves. She reported that Denise Simmons, member of the School Committee, Paula Evans, CRLS Principal and State Representative Jarrett Barrios^{*}, all support this proposal. She added that there is a growing movement throughout the country to allow 16 and 17 year-old people to vote. She urged the City Council to be responsive to the young people's desire to be involved.

Darlene Bonislowski, 23 Regent Street, member of the Cambridge Election Commission, stated that she is not speaking for the Commission. She has done voter

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registration at CRLS over the years. Students were very enthusiastic about being registered to vote. The underage students were always very disappointed. A mock P.R. election at the high school engendered enthusiasm and hard work by the students. Students voted very differently from their parents.

Vice Mayor Maher asked if 17 year-olds could be candidates. Ms. Bonislowski said that she did not know. She would have to research this.

Councillor Sullivan asked how many 18 year-olds would be registered at the school:

Judy Somberg, 48 Antrim Street, parent of a 17 year-old, stated that we need more voters. What's voting now is money, and as financial interests determines more and more, people become more cynical and stop participating. The young people are smart, articulate, thoughtful and most are at a stage where they are still involved. We need their vote.

Susan Smith, Cambridge, stated that she has two kids in the Cambridge School system. The system educates its students well enough to be able to vote responsibly. We have to give kids a place to be involved.

Councillor Braude invited comments from the members of the committee.

Councillor Sullivan said he is continuously impressed with the depth of knowledge and involvement of the Cambridge Youth. Cambridge does invest in its youth. He does not equate civic participation only with voting. Many more residents volunteer. He also said that the timing is unfortunate, with regard to what the City Council did two weeks ago, in voting to extend voting rights to non citizens.

Councillor Davis thanked all of the proponents. She stated that it is very important for kids to have connection with their community to begin voting. They are much more likely to feel connected to the community they have lived in for years than with whatever community their college is located in.

Councillor Toomey stated that they had made a great case. He does not support giving the vote to 16 year-olds, but he is open to considering allowing 17 year-olds to vote.

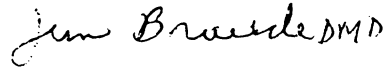
Vice Mayor Maher thanked all of the speakers and complimented their level of advocacy. He said that there has to be a lot more dialogue about the issue. He does not know how he will vote. He is concerned about some aspects, but very willing to listen. Cambridge spends more money in education than any other Massachusetts community. He said that he participated in campaigns as a teenager. Even without the right to vote teens still have the right to participate and that participation can make an enormous difference.

Councillor Braude stated that if there is no objection, the matter will stay in committee. The next step is to draft a home rule petition addressing some of the issues raised in the hearing, including whether the proposal should cover both 16 and 17 year-olds, or 17 year-old only. It was so agreed without objection.

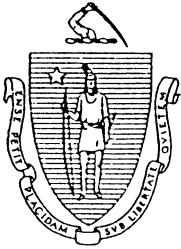
Councillor Braude thanked those present for their participation.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:48 p. m.

For the Committee,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jim Braude DMD".

Councillor Jim Braude, Chair



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1054

JARRETT T. BARRIOS
REPRESENTATIVE
28TH MIDDLESEX DISTRICT

KARLA J. ARMENOFF
LEGISLATIVE AIDE

Committees:
Banks and Banking
Housing and Urban Development
Science and Technology

ROOM 130, STATE HOUSE
TEL. (617) 722-2130

**Written Testimony Prepared for Cambridge City Council Hearing
On Lowering the Voting Age to 16**

**Submitted by State Representative Jarrett Barrios
Thursday, November 16, 2000**

Voting is a right that too many of us take for granted. As national and state politics have less and less of an impact on the daily lives of our neighbors, many of us have lost our connection with this most important of rights. Because so many of us have worked to register voters – indeed, more than a few Cantabridgians spent time in the South during the 1960s enfranchising African Americans – it is sad to feel this disconnect.

We need to think in new ways about voting. One of the most important ways to interest voters in their political system is to show them that it affects their lives. The most direct – and immediate – impact is politics at the local level. Serendipitously, it is at the local level that we have the most freedom to experiment with solving this problem.

Our youth must be brought into the circle of our political conversation. Giving youth the right to vote in local races will encourage elected officials to reach out to them—and empower youth opinion in the process. Giving 16 year-olds the right to vote will bring them in because elected officials and candidates will reach out to include them.

Young voters are affected by a host of issues on which municipal officials decide. They are the chief "consumers" of our public schools and would have a "say" in the determination of policy. They use the open space with the greatest frequency and use the libraries more than most other residents. With a vote on these local affairs, young people would be counted among the people who make decisions in the city. This initiative deserves the thoughtful support of Cambridge residents. I respectfully urge the members of the City Council to cast a vote in favor of this important initiative.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jarrett Barrios". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "B".

Jarrett Barrios
STATE REPRESENTATIVE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**CAMPAIGN FOR A DEMOCRATIC FUTURE YOUTH
REPRESENTATIVES TO TESTIFY IN FAVOR OF LEGISLATION
TO LOWER LOCAL VOTING AGE**

CAMBRIDGE, Massachusetts. Campaign for a Democratic Future youth representatives will testify this week for legislation that would make Cambridge the first city in America to reduce its local voting age to 16, for City Council, School Committee and referenda. The testimony will take place at a public hearing at **Cambridge City Hall on Thursday, November 16, at 5:30 PM.**

Campaign for a Democratic Future endorses a voting age of 16 for local elections. "Our nation desperately needs a fresh new generation of voters," said Jesse Baer, 16. "Letting youth vote would get us in the habit of voting. Also, since most people under 18 haven't yet moved off to college, we tend to feel more connected with our communities, and are therefore likelier to be interested in local elections." To those who worry that 16 year olds are too immature to vote, Jonathan Bruderlein, 14, responds: "We're old enough to drive cars, have consensual sex, get married without parental consent, make wages and pay taxes why not vote?"

Campaign for a Democratic Future is a coalition of youth and adults dedicated to expanding voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds.

Press Contact:

Jesse Baer

Campaign for a Democratic Future

(617) 547-7932

jsbww@mac.com

**SHOULD WE LOWER THE LOCAL VOTING AGE?
AN ABRIDGED GUIDE TO THE ISSUE**

REASONS TO SUPPORT LOWERING THE LOCAL VOTING AGE

IT WOULD REVITALIZE DEMOCRACY & TACKLE APATHY

Allowing sixteen and seventeen year olds to vote at least once while they're still in school will make it more likely that they'll be connected to our community and be informed in our decision-making. The "trickle-up effect" is significant - studies show that when young people are engaged, parents also become more likely to be engaged. Lowering the voting age would increase interest in politics among both adults and young people.

The statistics are alarming. Only 32 percent of 18-24 year olds voted in 1996, a presidential election year. The figure is disturbing compared to both the already low overall turnout that year (only 49 percent) and to youth voting in the past (about 50 percent in 1972). If we don't do something, nothing indicates that this trend will level off or reverse itself. What will happen in 30 years when only 15 percent of the public is voting? Let's start tackling the problem now. When voting habits are formed in high school, chances are they'll continue to vote after graduation

IF YOUTH WANT TO GET INVOLVED, WHY NOT SUPPORT THEM?

Usually, youth are pegged by older adults as *slackers*. In seeking the right to vote, young people are *asking* to be involved. "Our adults should be out there working for this to pass and getting youth involved, not the other way around. Political systems need to bend and move with the times in order to stay strong."

16 & 17 YEAR OLDS ARE NOW GIVEN MANY RESPONSIBILITIES

At age 16, the state allows them to get behind a wheel, get married without parental consent, decide to drop out of high school, get a job and at age 17, they can sign up to join the military. Sixteen year-olds pay taxes on savings, sales and income. As one teenager said, "If the government is going to spend our tax money, then we deserve the right to vote on what it's going to be spend on."

YOUTH ARE GREATLY AFFECTED BY ISSUES, ESPECIALLY LOCAL

Young people have a strong interest in improving education, reducing poverty, preventing crime and protecting the environment. A higher voter turnout brought about by a lower voting age will make it easier for teens and adults to organize and pressure government to more fully address these serious problems.

GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO BECOME MORE RESPONSIVE TO PROBLEMS FACED BY YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS

"The old phrase is, "if you don't vote, you don't count." Perhaps this is why both Bush's and Gore's proposed budgets have .6% and 2.6% respectfully, going towards education and 55-70% going towards the elderly." If we had a block of youth voting, a broader spectrum of issues

would be addressed. Addressing so called “youth” issues—such as improving education and reducing crime—would improve the lives of everyone in our communities.

“Our children have not fared well in the political process. Too many of our youth are at risk, without adequate education, health care or after school supervision. Many graduates from high school are without job skills and the supply of quality childcare is inadequate. In addition, there are increasing reports of child abuse and serious problems affecting children, such as drugs and pregnancy.” This proposal to lower the voting age gives children the missing item to protect a children’s agenda: the power to affect that agenda. In our democracy, this includes the right to vote.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST ARE NOT CONVINCING

- **ISN’T 16 too young?** Young people at ages 16 and 17 have the maturity to vote – the state already expects them to engage in other adult activities. They can be married without parental permission, get a driver’s license, get jobs and pay taxes.
 - **Do they have enough maturity and intelligence to vote?** Some do and some don’t, just as some at age 20, 30, 60 or 90 do and others don’t. Reports indicate that government information pamphlets, most newspapers and popular magazines are written to a sixth grade reading level. If we expect adults to understand information at an 8th grade level, then certainly 10th graders have the same ability to access information as adults.
 - **Won’t this create a larger pool of ignorant voters?** Sixteen and seventeen year olds take courses on history and civics that prepare them. Plus, imagine if teachers could prepare students on the meaning and procedures of voting then walk them over to polling sites together.
 - **But today, isn’t it the ones in the young end of spectrum who don’t vote?** Many 18 year olds move to new communities (for college or jobs) where they are unfamiliar with local politics. They are usually tied down with school, work, some have families to support. A voting age of sixteen would be better because they can vote while they’re still connected to a community and their school. Sixteen year olds have knowledge about politics, but are less cynical and apathetic than college aged voters and have more time to focus on it.
 - **Why don’t we just adopt that mock voting program?** KidsVoting—a program which encourages children of all ages to submit ‘votes’ in fake ballot boxes placed in real polling sites—has been shown to be an effective educational program. However, across the country, it ceases to draw interest after the 8th grade level. High school students need to feel that their opinions are respected and count “for real”. In addition, issues like education, crime, poverty, social security preservation and environmental protection need the input of young people. This can only be provided by a meaningful vote that would force government to take youth interests seriously.
-

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

Contact Jesse Baer
(617) 547-7932
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City of Cambridge

O-16.

IN CITY COUNCIL

April 2, 2001

COUNCILLOR BORN

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to confer with the Law Department for an opinion on the legality of a home rule petition allowing 16 and 17-year-old residents to vote, and further, the City Manager be requested to make sure the Election Commissioners are involved.

In City Council April 2, 2001.

Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D. Margaret Drury".

D. Margaret Drury
City Clerk

SEE CALENDAR ITEM #5

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Councillor Toomey stated that they had made a great case. He does not support giving the vote to 16 year-olds, but he is open to considering allowing 17 year-olds to vote.

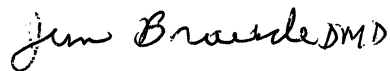
Vice Mayor Maher thanked all of the speakers and complimented their level of advocacy. He said that there has to be a lot more dialogue about the issue. He does not know how he will vote. He is concerned about some aspects, but very willing to listen. Cambridge spends more money in education than any other Massachusetts community. He said that he participated in campaigns as a teenager. Even without the right to vote teens still have the right to participate and that participation can make an enormous difference.

Councillor Braude stated that if there is no objection, the matter will stay in committee. The next step is to draft a home rule petition addressing some of the issues raised in the hearing, including whether the proposal should cover both 16 and 17 year-olds, or 17 year-old only. It was so agreed without objection.

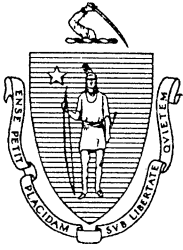
Councillor Braude thanked those present for their participation.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:48 p. m.

For the Committee,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Braude" followed by the letters "DMD" in a slightly larger, bold font.

Councillor Jim Braude, Chair



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1054

JARRETT T. BARRIOS
REPRESENTATIVE
28TH MIDDLESEX DISTRICT

KARLA J. ARMENOFF
LEGISLATIVE AIDE

Committees:
Banks and Banking
Housing and Urban Development
Science and Technology

ROOM 130, STATE HOUSE
TEL. (617) 722-2130

**Written Testimony Prepared for Cambridge City Council Hearing
On Lowering the Voting Age to 16**

**Submitted by State Representative Jarrett Barrios
Thursday, November 16, 2000**

Voting is a right that too many of us take for granted. As national and state politics have less and less of an impact on the daily lives of our neighbors, many of us have lost our connection with this most important of rights. Because so many of us have worked to register voters – indeed, more than a few Cantabridgians spent time in the South during the 1960s enfranchising African Americans – it is sad to feel this disconnect.

We need to think in new ways about voting. One of the most important ways to interest voters in their political system is to show them that it affects their lives. The most direct – and immediate – impact is politics at the local level. Serendipitously, it is at the local level that we have the most freedom to experiment with solving this problem.

Our youth must be brought into the circle of our political conversation. Giving youth the right to vote in local races will encourage elected officials to reach out to them—and empower youth opinion in the process. Giving 16 year-olds the right to vote will bring them in because elected officials and candidates will reach out to include them.

Young voters are affected by a host of issues on which municipal officials decide. They are the chief "consumers" of our public schools and would have a "say" in the determination of policy. They use the open space with the greatest frequency and use the libraries more than most other residents. With a vote on these local affairs, young people would be counted among the people who make decisions in the city. This initiative deserves the thoughtful support of Cambridge residents. I respectfully urge the members of the City Council to cast a vote in favor of this important initiative.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jarrett Barrios". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "B".

Jarrett Barrios
STATE REPRESENTATIVE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**CAMPAIGN FOR A DEMOCRATIC FUTURE YOUTH
REPRESENTATIVES TO TESTIFY IN FAVOR OF LEGISLATION
TO LOWER LOCAL VOTING AGE**

CAMBRIDGE, Massachusetts. Campaign for a Democratic Future youth representatives will testify this week for legislation that would make Cambridge the first city in America to reduce its local voting age to 16, for City Council, School Committee and referenda. The testimony will take place at a public hearing at **Cambridge City Hall on Thursday, November 16, at 5:30 PM.**

Campaign for a Democratic Future endorses a voting age of 16 for local elections. "Our nation desperately needs a fresh new generation of voters," said Jesse Baer, 16. "Letting youth vote would get us in the habit of voting. Also, since most people under 18 haven't yet moved off to college, we tend to feel more connected with our communities, and are therefore likelier to be interested in local elections." To those who worry that 16 year olds are too immature to vote, Jonathan Bruderlein, 14, responds: "We're old enough to drive cars, have consensual sex, get married without parental consent, make wages and pay taxes why not vote?"

Campaign for a Democratic Future is a coalition of youth and adults dedicated to expanding voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds.

Press Contact:

Jesse Baer

Campaign for a Democratic Future

(617) 547-7932

jsbww@mac.com

SHOULD WE LOWER THE LOCAL VOTING AGE? AN ABRIDGED GUIDE TO THE ISSUE

REASONS TO SUPPORT LOWERING THE LOCAL VOTING AGE

IT WOULD REVITALIZE DEMOCRACY & TACKLE APATHY

Allowing sixteen and seventeen year olds to vote at least once while they're still in school will make it more likely that they'll be connected to our community and be informed in our decision-making. The "trickle-up effect" is significant - studies show that when young people are engaged, parents also become more likely to be engaged. Lowering the voting age would increase interest in politics among both adults and young people.

The statistics are alarming. Only 32 percent of 18-24 year olds voted in 1996, a presidential election year. The figure is disturbing compared to both the already low overall turnout that year (only 49 percent) and to youth voting in the past (about 50 percent in 1972). If we don't do something, nothing indicates that this trend will level off or reverse itself. What will happen in 30 years when only 15 percent of the public is voting? Let's start tackling the problem now. When voting habits are formed in high school, chances are they'll continue to vote after graduation

IF YOUTH WANT TO GET INVOLVED, WHY NOT SUPPORT THEM?

Usually, youth are pegged by older adults as *slackers*. In seeking the right to vote, young people are *asking* to be involved. "Our adults should be out there working for this to pass and getting youth involved, not the other way around. Political systems need to bend and move with the times in order to stay strong."

16 & 17 YEAR OLDS ARE NOW GIVEN MANY RESPONSIBILITIES

At age 16, the state allows them to get behind a wheel, get married without parental consent, decide to drop out of high school, get a job and at age 17, they can sign up to join the military. Sixteen year-olds pay taxes on savings, sales and income. As one teenager said, "If the government is going to spend our tax money, then we deserve the right to vote on what it's going to be spend on."

YOUTH ARE GREATLY AFFECTED BY ISSUES, ESPECIALLY LOCAL

Young people have a strong interest in improving education, reducing poverty, preventing crime and protecting the environment. A higher voter turnout brought about by a lower voting age will make it easier for teens and adults to organize and pressure government to more fully address these serious problems.

GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO BECOME MORE RESPONSIVE TO PROBLEMS FACED BY YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS

"The old phrase is, "if you don't vote, you don't count." Perhaps this is why both Bush's and Gore's proposed budgets have .6% and 2.6% respectfully, going towards education and 55-70% going towards the elderly." If we had a block of youth voting, a broader spectrum of issues

would be addressed. Addressing so called “youth” issues—such as improving education and reducing crime—would improve the lives of everyone in our communities.

“Our children have not fared well in the political process. Too many of our youth are at risk, without adequate education, health care or after school supervision. Many graduates from high school are without job skills and the supply of quality childcare is inadequate. In addition, there are increasing reports of child abuse and serious problems affecting children, such as drugs and pregnancy.” This proposal to lower the voting age gives children the missing item to protect a children’s agenda: the power to affect that agenda. In our democracy, this includes the right to vote.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST ARE NOT CONVINCING

- **ISN’T 16 too young?** Young people at ages 16 and 17 have the maturity to vote – the state already expects them to engage in other adult activities. They can be married without parental permission, get a driver’s license, get jobs and pay taxes.
 - **Do they have enough maturity and intelligence to vote?** Some do and some don’t, just as some at age 20, 30, 60 or 90 do and others don’t. Reports indicate that government information pamphlets, most newspapers and popular magazines are written to a sixth grade reading level. If we expect adults to understand information at an 8th grade level, then certainly 10th graders have the same ability to access information as adults.
 - **Won’t this create a larger pool of ignorant voters?** Sixteen and seventeen year olds take courses on history and civics that prepare them. Plus, imagine if teachers could prepare students on the meaning and procedures of voting then walk them over to polling sites together.
 - **But today, isn’t it the ones in the young end of spectrum who don’t vote?** Many 18 year olds move to new communities (for college or jobs) where they are unfamiliar with local politics. They are usually tied down with school, work, some have families to support. A voting age of sixteen would be better because they can vote while they’re still connected to a community and their school. Sixteen year olds have knowledge about politics, but are less cynical and apathetic than college aged voters and have more time to focus on it.
 - **Why don’t we just adopt that mock voting program?** KidsVoting—a program which encourages children of all ages to submit ‘votes’ in fake ballot boxes placed in real polling sites—has been shown to be an effective educational program. However, across the country, it ceases to draw interest after the 8th grade level. High school students need to feel that their opinions are respected and count “for real”. In addition, issues like education, crime, poverty, social security preservation and environmental protection need the input of young people. This can only be provided by a meaningful vote that would force government to take youth interests seriously.
-

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

Contact Jesse Baer

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City of Cambridge

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, RULES
AND CLAIMS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

In City Council March 19, 2001

*Councillor Jim Braude, Chair
Councillor Henrietta Davis
Vice Mayor David P. Maher
Councillor Michael A. Sullivan
Councillor Timothy J. Toomey, Jr.*

The Government Operations, Rules and Claims Committee held a public hearing on November 16, 2000, beginning at 5:50 o'clock p.m. in the Sullivan Chamber for the purpose of considering a proposal to petition the legislature to lower the voting age to enable 16 and 17 year-old residents to vote in City Council and School Committee elections.

Present at the hearing were Councillor Jim Braude, Chair of the Committee, Mayor Anthony D. Galluccio, Vice Mayor David P. Maher, Councillor Kathleen L. Born, Councillor Henrietta Davis, Councillor Marjorie C. Decker, Councillor Kenneth E. Reeves, Councillor Michael A. Sullivan, Councillor Timothy J. Toomey, Jr., and City Clerk D. Margaret Drury.

Councillor Braude convened the hearing and explained the purpose. He made introductory remarks and invited Mayor Galluccio, who had to leave to chair a meeting of the School Committee, to begin.

Mayor Galluccio stated that the petition is part of a far-reaching goal to involve youth. The Kids Council is voting tonight on a proposal to add youth members to the council. He voiced his support for the proposal for 17 year-olds to vote and said he was not quite sure about 16 year-olds. For 17 year-olds, it is important to get them involved while they are still at the high school.

Councillor Decker welcomed the students in attendance and urged them to stay involved in the political process regardless of the outcome. She said that she too supports the vote for 17 year-olds and has some questions about 16 year-olds.

Councillor Born said that she was skeptical about the proposal until she talked to students who were persuasive in their argument that this will help to get young people in the habit of voting while they are still in their home environment.

Councillor Braude then moved to public testimony.

David "Max" Prum, 100 Thorndike Street, age 14, spoke in support of the proposal. He stated that voter apathy is a big problem in America. One way to combat that apathy is to lower the voting age so voting can be discussed at school.

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1155

Committee Report #7

Committee Report from Councillor Jim Braude, Chair of the Government Operations, Rules and Claims Committee for a meeting held on November 16, 2000 for the purpose of considering a proposal to petition the legislature to lower the voting age to enable 16 and 17 year-old residents to vote in City Council and School Committee elections.

In City Council March 19, 2001

*Charter Right exercised
by Councillor Davis*

In City Council

April 2, 2001

Amended Report Accepted

PLACED ON FILE

ORDER ADOPTED