



Department of the Secretary of State

Bureau of Corporations, Elections and Commissions

Shenna Bellows
Secretary of State

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COMMITTEE ON STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Testimony of Shenna Bellows Secretary of State
Department of the Secretary of State

In support of

L.D. 1051 “An Act To Promote Civic Engagement and Voter Participation For Young People By Lowering the Voting Age For Municipal Elections to 16 Years of Age”

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack and Members of the Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Joann Bautista and I am the Deputy Secretary of State Policy Advisor. I am speaking for Secretary Bellows today in support of L.D. 1051 “An Act To Promote Civic Engagement and Voter Participation For Young People By Lowering the Voting Age For Municipal Elections to 16 Years of Age.”

As Secretary Bellows has said, democracy is stronger when it represents everyone, and when everyone can participate – and this includes our young people. In spite of the belief that 16- and 17- year-olds lack the ability to make informed decisions, we are seeing multitudes of youth get involved in politics and organizing complex grassroots movements demanding action on climate change, gun violence, and civil rights issues.ⁱ All done in response to decisions made by politicians and governments which yield consequences that impact young people.

Already we have seen municipalities across the United Statesⁱⁱ and several countries, like Austria and Argentina,ⁱⁱⁱ see the value in allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote and extending the right to do so. Going further, 18 states including the District of Columbia and our own state of Maine, allow for 16- or 17- year-olds to pre-register to vote in primary elections so that when they turn 18, they can cast their ballot^{iv} – but we can do more.

Not allowing our young people the opportunity to get involved in elections at the municipal level, means we are essentially stopping them from making voting a ritual habit and practicing lifelong civic engagement. Not only that, a Danish professor from the Copenhagen Business School, studied Danish election data and identified a “trickle up phenomenon” – where families had voting-aged youth at home, it also increased the chance their parent or guardian would vote too.^v Enfranchising young voters is necessary for the survival of our democracy.

In summary, there is overwhelming support for lowering the voting age – from municipal to the federal level to countries around the world that have already implemented inclusive voting laws. Meaningful civics information coupled with giving young people the opportunity to become true participants in

democracy can lead to less cynicism and disillusionment in their elected leaders and government and ultimately, a more representative democracy.

On behalf of the Secretary of State, I thank you and would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

ⁱ Jennifer McNulty, *Youth Activism is on the Rise Around the Globe, and Adults Should Pay Attention, Says Author*, Sept. 17, 2019, <https://news.ucsc.edu/2019/09/taft-youth.html>.

ⁱⁱ Vote16USA, *Vote16USA Factsheet*, available at <https://vote16usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Vote16USA-General-Fact-Sheet-2018.pdf> (last accessed Mar. 15, 2021).

ⁱⁱⁱ Arnett, George, *Votes for 16- and 17-year-olds – where else outside Scotland?*, *The Guardian*, Jun. 18, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/datablog/2015/jun/18/votes-for-16--and-17-year-olds-where-else-outside-scotland>.

^{iv} National Conference of State Legislators, *Voting Age for Primary Elections*, Jan. 05, 2021, <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/primaries-voting-age.aspx>.

^v Dahlgaard, Jen Olav, *The Surprising Consequence of Lowering the Voting Age*, *Washington Post*, Mar. 01, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/02/28/the-surprising-consequence-of-lowering-the-voting-age/>.