



November 13, 2018

By Electronic Mail

Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Re: In Support of B22-0778 - Youth Vote Amendment Act of 2018

Dear Chairman Mendelson and Members of the Council:

On behalf of the Campaign Legal Center (CLC), we are submitting this letter in support of the Youth Vote Amendment Act of 2018, B22-0778, which would lower the voting age in the District to sixteen years old. The Council has repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to making the democratic process more accessible and it should continue to be a national leader in this area. This bill would increase political participation in the District, and is consistent with other inclusive democracy reforms enacted by this Council, like automatic voter registration and public financing.

Across the country, young people are asking to be counted,¹ and a handful of U.S. localities have taken notice. In 2015, Takoma Park, Maryland, lowered the voting age to sixteen, becoming the first U.S. city to do so. In 2016, Berkeley, California, lowered the voting age to sixteen for city school board elections.² Further afield, many foreign jurisdictions have lowered the voting age to sixteen to engage

¹ See VOTE 16 USA, <http://vote16usa.org/>.

² OFFICIAL ELECTION SITE OF ALAMEDA CTY., *General Election Certified Results Measure Y1 - City of Berkeley* (Nov. 8, 2016), http://www.acgov.org/rov/current_election/230/index.htm (the measure passed by ballot initiative in Berkeley with 70.31% of the vote).

young people, including Scotland,³ Austria,⁴ and some German states;⁵ and similar legislative proposals are being considered by other countries.⁶

This legislation is important and timely. Political decisions have significant effects on the lives of our youngest community members, and they are becoming increasingly engaged in our political process.⁷ This new, diverse generation represents the future of the District. They are not only affected by the District's political decision-making in the short term, but they will continue to be affected by decisions around policy issues like education, gun control, healthcare, and climate change for many years to come. The District should capitalize on this current momentum to further engage these young people and imbue them with a lifelong sense of political engagement and civic responsibility.

I. Enfranchising Young People Makes Them More Likely to Participate in the Political Process Throughout Their Lives and Increases Political Participation in the Community as a Whole

This bill would have positive short and long-run effects on this generation's democratic participation. Case studies indicate that newly enfranchised young people are even more likely than average voters to vote in local elections. After Takoma Park lowered its voting age, the Takoma Park City Mayor's Office found

³ Scottish Independence Referendum Franchise Act 2013, (Scot.) (2013).

⁴ 31/BNR (XXIII. GP) Bundes-Verfassungsgesetz, ss. 1, 5 and 25, Republik Österreich Parlament (Austria).

⁵ See THE LOC., *Hamburgers Can Now Vote At Age 16* (Feb. 14, 2013), <https://www.thelocal.de/20130214/47967>.

⁶ See, e.g., Commonwealth Electoral Amendment Lowering Voting Age and Increasing Voter Participation Bill 2018 (Austl.) (proposed bill currently before the Australian Senate); Electoral Amendment Voting at 16 Bill 2016 (Ir.) (proposed bill currently before the Irish Senate); NOR. MINISTRY OF LOC. GOV'T AND MODERNISATION, *The Trial of Reduced Voting Age to 16 for the Local Elections in 2015* (Nor.), https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/elections-and-democracy/den-norske-valgordningen/forsok-med-stemmerett-for-16-aringer_2/trial-of-reduced-voting-age-to-16-for-th/id581646/ (describing the trial program the Norwegian government is undertaking to determine the effects of lowering the voting age). See also Paul Schmidt & Johanna Edthofer, *Voting at 16 in Austria: A Possible Model for the EU?*, ELCANO ROYAL INST. (Dec. 7, 2018), http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/ri/elcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/ari88-2018-schmidt-edthofer-voting-16-austria-possible-model-eu, (proposing the voting age be lowered to sixteen throughout the E.U. to foster engagement with the European project).

⁷ THE CTR. FOR INFO. & RES. ON CIVIC LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT, *Young People Dramatically Increase Their Turnout to 31%, Shape 2018 Midterm Elections* (Nov. 7, 2018), <https://civicyouth.org/young-people-dramatically-increase-their-turnout-31-percent-shape-2018-midterm-elections/> (finding that youth turnout in the 2018 midterms was higher than at any point in the past thirty years). See also KidsPost, *Students Protest Gun Violence in D.C. March for Our Lives*, THE WASH. POST (Mar. 24, 2018), https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/kidspost/students-protest-gun-violence-in-dc-march/2018/03/24/39995b0c-2fcf-11e8-8688-e053ba58f1e4_story.html?utm_term=.1937f5f0b0cf (describing the D.C. march as “a historic groundswell of youth activism.”).

that youth voter turnout was more than double that of average voter turnout in local elections, in both 2015 and 2017.⁸ Likewise, after Scotland lowered its voting age to sixteen, 75% of sixteen and seventeen-year-olds voted in the Scottish independence referendum, compared with 54% of eighteen to twenty-four-year-olds.⁹ Similarly, young people became more interested in politics in Austria after they were newly franchised.¹⁰

Studies show that voters are more likely to vote in their first election if they become eligible to vote at sixteen rather than eighteen.¹¹ This makes sense. Young people will more easily master the logistics of voting if their first election occurs while they are still living at home, at a stable address, and with families who can advise them, rather than when they are first living away from home, sometimes in transient domestic situations like studying in college, traveling, or serving in the military.¹² Additionally, enfranchising voters at sixteen makes political engagement salient to them: they are likely have long-standing ties to the ward in which they are voting and substantial experience with the issues facing their home community; they also enjoy access to the resources of high school and the opportunity to debate political events with their families, friends and teachers.

⁸ Mayor Kate Stewart, *Expanding Access to Voting: Encouraging 16-Year-Olds to Vote*, CITY OF TAKOMA PARK (Jan. 27, 2018), https://www.mayorsinnovation.org/images/uploads/pdf/Voting_Stewart.pdf. See also J.B. Wogan, *Takoma Park Sees High Turnout Among Teens After Election Reform*, GOVERNING (Nov. 7, 2013), <http://www.governing.com/news/headlines/gov-maryland-city-sees-high-turnout-among-teens-after-election-reform.html>.

⁹ UK ELECTORAL COMM'N, *Scottish Independence Referendum Research* (Nov. 2014), https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/179807/Scottish-referendum-Public-Opinion-survey-ICM-Report-WEBSITE.pdf. See also Jan Eichhorn, *Beyond Anecdotes on Lowering the Voting Age: New Evidence from Scotland*, LONDON SCH. ECON. & POL. SCI., <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/votes-at-16-new-evidence-from-scotland/> (“the newly enfranchised young people in Scotland [compared to other 16- and 17-year-olds in the UK] indeed show substantially higher levels of engagement with representative democracy”).

¹⁰ Eva Zeglovits, *Political Interest of Adolescents Before and After Lowering the Voting Age: The Case of Austria*, 16 J. YOUTH STUD. 1084 (2013).

¹¹ Joshua Douglas, *In Defense of Lowering the Voting Age*, 165 U. PENN. L. REV. 63 (2017) (finding sixteen-year-old voters are more likely to register to vote when they are living at home and feel more tied to their communities than shortly after leaving home); Eva Zeglovits & Julian Aichholzer, *Are People More Inclined to Vote at 16 than at 18? Evidence for the First-Time Voting Boost Among 16-to 25-Year-Olds in Austria*, 24 J. OF ELECTIONS, PUBLIC OPINION AND PARTIES 351 (2014) (finding that sixteen-year-old voters are more likely to vote in their first election than first-time voters aged eighteen to twenty).

¹² Joshua Douglas, *In Defense of Lowering the Voting Age*, 165 U. PENN. L. REV. 63 (2017) (finding that turning eighteen is a tumultuous time of transition for many young adults, which lowers their likelihood of voting); Yosef Bhatti & Kasper M. Hansen, *Leaving the Nest and the Social Act of Voting: Turnout Among First-Time Voters*, 22 J. OF ELECTIONS, PUBLIC OPINION AND PARTIES 380 (2012) (finding that parents have more of an ability to influence young people’s decisions to vote at aged sixteen while they are still living at home than later in life).

But the positives of youth registration go above and beyond once-off participation when these young voters are first enfranchised. Studies have consistently demonstrated that voting is a habit.¹³ After someone votes once, they better understand the logistics of voting and become accustomed to the process. Furthermore, not only are family members likely to discuss political events with these young people and help them better understand the logistics of voting if they are still living at home, their families are also likely to go the polls with them. This is why studies have shown that enfranchising young voters makes their parents and caregivers more likely to turn out to vote as well.¹⁴

II. Conclusion

In short, extending the right to vote to younger members of our community would foster a more vibrant and engaged democracy. We encourage the Council to continue its support of laws that make the District's political process more accessible to all residents. For these reasons, the Campaign Legal Center supports the Youth Vote Amendment Act of 2018 and urges the Council to take favorable action on this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

/s/
Tara Molloy
Senior Director of Appellate Litigation & Strategy

/s/
Catherine Hinckley Kelley
Director of Policy & State Programs

¹³ David Cutts, *Is Voting Habit Forming? The Longitudinal Impact of a GOTV Campaign in the UK*, 19 J. OF ELECTIONS, PUB. OPINION AND PARTIES 251 (2009) (demonstrating that voting is a learned habit); Alan S. Gerber et. al, *Voting May Be Habit-Forming: Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment*, 47 AM. J. POL. SCI 540 (2003) (same).

¹⁴ Jens Olav Dahlgaard, *Trickle-Up Political Socialization: The Causal Effect on Turnout of Parenting a Newly Enfranchised Voter*, 112 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 698 (2018) (evidencing this effect in Denmark).