



Testimony in Support of SB 802
16-year-old Preregistration
Senate Rules Committee

March 6, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 802. Project Vote is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to realizing the promise of American democracy. Our mission is to build an electorate that accurately represents the diversity of America's citizenry, by ensuring that every eligible citizen can register to vote and cast a ballot that counts. Younger citizens are a consistently underrepresented demographic group throughout our nation, in terms of both registration rates and voter participation. Preregistration is an important way to increase young voter engagement while also increasing administrative efficiency.

Lowering the preregistration age to 16 will provide more opportunities for young people to get on the voter rolls. In addition to engaging young voters, preregistration can increase accuracy and efficiency. Many young people preregistering to vote will likely do so through the department of motor vehicles or online,¹ which reduces the likelihood of errors made on paper applications and saves money per registration. Additionally, election administrators are often inundated with new registrations close to an election. With preregistration, more registrations may be processed at a dispersed rate throughout the year, freeing up critical time for election officials during the busy election season. Expanding the age range for preregistration further distributes the receipt of registration applications over time.

Ten states offer preregistration to 16-year-olds. Louisiana and California originally offered preregistration for 17-year-olds and then lowered the age to 16.² Oregon should do the same. Setting the eligibility age at 16 would ensure even more opportunities to get young people pre-registered to vote and would increase the resultant election administration benefits overall.

¹ For example, soon after launching online system, Pennsylvania officials announced that applicants under 24 years of age were the largest group of online voter registration users." Laura Benshoff, "In Pennsylvania, Online Voter Registration a Boon to Young Voters," *Newsworks*, March 28, 2016, <http://www.newsworks.org/index.php/local/pa-suburbs/92304-in-pennsylvania-online-voter-registration-a-boon-to-young-voters>.

² See Louisiana HB 501 (2014) and California SB 113 (2014). Louisiana lowered the preregistration age from 17 to 16 only at the office of motor vehicles, which featured an automated opt-out system for preregistration instead of the traditional opt-in system.

A popular misconception about preregistration is that young people move around so frequently that their information would need to be updated before voting for the first time, thereby making preregistration a wasted effort. However, preregistered voters remain valid on the voter rolls at a rate similar to other registrants.³ One study of college students found that, among those who were unregistered or registered at home although away at school, three-fourths would prefer to stay registered in their hometowns.⁴ Another study of preregistration programs in Hawaii and Florida concluded that, contrary to popular belief, preregistered voters are *not* “transients who will disappear once they graduate from high school.”⁵ Both Hawaii and Florida offer preregistration to those 16 years of age or older.

Preregistration is a common sense reform. Similar laws have garnered bipartisan support in other states.⁶ SB 802 simply expands the number of young adults who may benefit from preregistration, while also increasing election administration efficiency. Project Vote urges swift passage of this bill.

Michael Slater
President
Project Vote
202.425.5493
mslater@projectvote.org

³ Michael P. McDonald and Matthew Thornurg, Registering the Youth Through Voter Preregistration, 13 LEGIS. & PUB. POL 551 567 (2010).

⁴ Richard G. Niemi and Michael J. Hamner, *Voter Turnout Among College Students: New Data and a Rethinking of Traditional Theories*, 91 SOC. SCI. Q 301, 312-13 (2010).

⁵ McDonald & Thornurg, *supra* note 3, at 567.

⁶ Preregistration in Florida passed with overwhelming bipartisan support and was signed into law by a Republican governor. Likewise, when Louisiana lowered the preregistration age from 17 to 16 at the office of motor vehicles, the measure passed with strong bipartisan support and enjoyed unanimous support in the state senate.