

Senator Rob Wagner, Chair
Senator Fred Girod, Vice Chair
Senate Committee On Rules

Thursday, March 11, 2021

Support for SB 776 and SJR 25

I strongly support the passing of these bills. These bills will give voice to students who already make many of their own educational decisions, and encourage participation in civics from a younger generation. 16 and 17 year olds are ready to vote, and we are just as affected by political issues as anyone else.

Many students when they enter high school are entirely, or mostly, responsible for their own education. Most parents step back and let their students have the independence of choosing classes, after school activities, sports, etc. With this in mind, why shouldn't students also get to decide who represents them on the board of education? Many people in opposition would say that 16 and 17 year olds' brains aren't developed enough to make such decisions, and in the same sentence cite that humans aren't fully ready to make such decisions until they are 25. And yet the current voting age is 18, so we already allow people who are supposedly unable to make informed political decisions, I thus consider this argument pointless and backward.

16 and 17 year olds are ready to vote. They have most likely taken a government class at this point, which is the only education we provide on the topic of voting. There isn't much more formal teaching that happens to get students ready to vote at 18. In fact, research has shown that cold cognition, which is the cognitive process we use to decide how to vote, matures by age 16, and does not improve with age.

16 and 17 year olds are just as affected by political decisions as any older age group. We will inherit the bad decisions of preceding generations, hence we should be able to have some amount of voice on the matter of our futures. Lowering the voting age will require politicians to listen to younger folks' concerns. This is super important for the above stated reason that we have just as much at stake as anyone else, if not more. Lastly, 16 year olds can work without a limit on our hours, drive, and in some cases are tried in adult courts. These are just a few things, but 16 year olds also pay income tax, just the same as anyone older would, and yet we have no say on how our tax dollars are being spent.

By lowering the voting age, we can create life-long voters out of a new generation of Americans. Voter turnout has been decreasing since 1960. These bills can be a way to make voting habitual for a new generation, and strengthen our democracy in the process. At the current voting age of 18, many people are moving on to new places whether it be for college or career, which pushes civic engagement to the back of their mind. By lowering the voting age to 16, students can get into the habit of voting at a younger age, and hopefully continue on as they age. Schools can be the perfect venue to get students excited about voting, and teach them how to do so. I would

like to make clear that schools have never and should never convince a student who to vote for, but rather the mechanism on how to do so and how to do their own due diligence.

SB 776 can be an opportunity to expand our civics education in schools to foster well informed citizens and bolster civic participation in younger generations of students yet to come. I strongly urge senators to support these bills. Thank you.