

Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Election Laws
In Support of [S.412](#) / [H.670](#) An Act enabling children's right to vote
By Keith Mandell, former board member of the National Youth Rights Association
June 21, 2023

Thank you Chair Ryan and Chair Keenan. I am honored to have been invited to speak out in support of Senate Bill 412 and House Bill 670.

My name is Keith Mandell and I have been involved in efforts to lower the voting age for over 25 years, since I was a law school. My focus has been on how lowering the voting age can build the habit of voting and improve the lives of young people.

It's common sense that when you learn a skill at a younger age, whether riding a bike or brushing your teeth, you are more likely to practice it throughout a lifetime. Also, 18 isn't an ideal age to start voting - most students have left high school for college or jobs. Many have moved away from the communities they have resided their entire lives. On the other hand, high school students have close ties to their communities. They are also learning about history and government in school and voting gives them an opportunity to put that knowledge into action.

Over the last few decades, countries around the world from Austria to Ecuador, Scotland to Brazil have already lowered their voting ages to 16. Several towns in the United States, have lowered their voting age to 16 for local elections. We now have actual data and can report the positive results a lower voting age can bring.

A 2020 survey of Austrian election voting found that turnout among first time voters 16 and 17 exceeded the turnout of first time voters 18 to 20 and was in line with the general population. Studies also found that young voters political maturity was in line with voters 18 to 20.

In Scotland, the results were similar-- 16 and 17 year olds turned out at higher rates than 18 to 24 year olds and continued to vote in higher numbers than older cohorts who started voting later. The Scotland study even found that for 16 and 17 year olds the voting gap across social classes disappeared, as turnout did not differ regardless of a family's income level.

In the United States, a study in Takoma Park Maryland found that again, turnout of 16 and 17 year olds in local elections exceeded turnout of young adults.

The habit of voting is being established. But lowering the voting age is about more than increasing turnout. The Scotland study also found that voting at 16 gave young people a boost of confidence that their voices were being heard and that they have the power to effect change. This is essential to building voters who will not only vote but also become involved with the issues that effect their communities.

I urge the committee to support Senate Bill 412 and House Bill 670 and also the other bills that are pending before the legislature, which include Senate bills S431, S438, and S429 and House bills H705, H686, H692, H3742, H716, H3874, and H3576.

Thank you