



Testimony In Support of House Resolution No. 5635

March 1, 2021

Generation Citizen is pleased to support House Resolution No. 5635, a joint resolution to submit to the electors a proposed state constitutional amendment to extend voting rights to citizens of the age 16 or over.

Extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds can spur a long-term increase in voter turnout, because voting is habitual, and research shows that age 16 is a better time than 18 to establish the habit. Rhode Island has already taken important steps to encourage youth engagement, including allowing 16-year-olds to preregister to vote. This resolution builds on these previous efforts with a solution that has proven effective in the dozen countries that allow voting by citizens under age 18, and in the municipalities in the United States that have taken such a step. Evidence from countries around the world and from United States municipalities that have implemented voting at ages 16 or 17 shows that, when given the opportunity, 16- and 17-year-olds turn out to vote at higher rates than 18- and 19-year-olds, indicating that it is indeed a better time to establish the habit of voting. Many 18-year olds are in a time of intense transition, but at 16, young people can cast their crucial first votes at a time when they are connected to their schools, homes, and communities in which they have deep roots.

This proposed state constitutional amendment also recognizes the fact that 16- and 17-year-olds work and pay taxes, including in jobs in essential businesses like grocery stores where their work has taken on new meaning amid the pandemic. They deserve a concrete say on the public policy decisions that affect them every day.

House Resolution No. 5635 aims to expand access to the democratic process and help instill a lifelong habit of voting. We are inspired by the young people in Rhode Island who are leading the way to advocate for the issues that matter most to them, including education and policies to promote civic engagement, and we are proud to support their efforts.

For all these reasons, Generation Citizen supports House Resolution No. 5635.

Submitted by: Brandon Klugman, Associate Director of Campaigns