

Hello, Chairman Shanley and members of the House Committee. My name is Avery Redlich and I am a freshman at Brown University, all the way from South Florida, studying Biophysics and Writing and serving on the Brown Votes Advocacy Team. I am here to testify in favor of Bill H 5382, which would move to allow sixteen-year-olds to vote in Rhode Island's city school-board elections.

Brown refers to their students as "architects of our own education." It is my hope that Rhode Island high school students have that same opportunity, that chance to take charge in their learning, through an ability to help elect officials who will best serve them and the greater Rhode Island community.

By setting the age requirement to vote in school board elections at sixteen years of age as opposed to eighteen currently, we allow those actively in the schools to have direct say in the people who represent them and facilitate their education. This should increase voter turnout, as well: this new pool of voters would be inherently more motivated to help select their representation than those less directly impacted by the operations of a school, such as the elderly, those without children, or even 18-year-olds who've graduated. With the ability to help influence school decisions, your student citizens will hopefully have more interest in their academics, becoming more excited to go to school and more ready for their pursuits after high school.

Additionally, by granting these citizens the chance to vote now, we empower them to make their voices heard in the democratic space, preparing them to someday vote in state and national elections. Voter education is a necessity, and with two extra years of learning to act and vote with careful consideration, these Rhode Island citizens will be more prepared for future democratic responsibilities.

From a school board perspective, I believe the inclusion of opinions from active students would be a benefit to the officials of the school committee, and thus the state itself. Students are your strongest first hand account of districts' needs, and would provide powerful indications for what decisions will have the most impact. Therefore, this bill would not only be a positive for the new voters, but for the education system as a whole.

As a student in this great state and an Advocate on Brown Votes, I truly believe that Bill H 5382 will set a valuable precedent about the importance of youth voices and their right to influence decisions that affect them, all while supporting the greater Rhode Island education system. We often hear people say, "children are our future." But our youth are here in the now, and so is that future, if only we allow young leaders to claim it. I hope you consider passing this legislation for the benefit of Rhode Islanders—for the benefit of our youth—and I thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.