



**DONALD R. GREBIEN
MAYOR**



The Honorable Evan P. Shanley
House Committee on State Government & Elections
82 Smith Street Providence, RI 02903

March 10, 2026

Dear Chairman, Shanley and Honorable Members of the House Committee on State Government & Local Elections,

I write to express my strong support for House Bill 7091, which would extend voting rights in school board elections to 16- and 17-year-olds. This legislation represents an important opportunity to expand civic participation and ensure that the voices of students are reflected in decisions that directly shape their educational experience.

In Pawtucket, we see every day how informed, engaged, and passionate our young people are. Students across our community are organizing around issues in their schools, advocating for stronger mental health support, contributing to conversations about curriculum and career pathways, and demonstrating leadership in classrooms, nonprofit organizations, and city initiatives. They are not simply the leaders of tomorrow; they are already leaders today.

Yet while they experience the direct impact of decisions made by school boards, they currently have no direct voice in choosing who represents them. School board decisions shape learning environments, determine access to opportunities, and influence the resources students depend on to succeed. If these policies affect them most immediately and directly, it is only fair that they have the opportunity to participate in selecting those who make them.

For these reasons, I stand firmly with Vote16USA and with youth leaders across Rhode Island who continue to demonstrate what thoughtful, active civic engagement looks like. Allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in school board elections will strengthen our democracy, not only by widening access, but by investing in lifelong civic habits early. Research consistently shows that when young people vote once, they are far more likely to remain voters for life.

This legislation is not simply about expanding voting rights; it is about believing in our young people. It is about recognizing them as stakeholders, decision-makers, and partners in building stronger, more responsive systems of public education.

I urge the General Assembly to move this legislation forward and to honor the voices of students who deserve representation in a system designed for them. Let's give them a say. Let's trust in their readiness. And together, let's build a Rhode Island where every student has both a seat at the table and a vote in shaping their future.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Grebien". The signature is stylized with a large, looping initial "D" and a period at the end.

Donald R. Grebien
Mayor
City of Pawtucket