



The Honorable Evan P. Shanley
House Committee on State Government & Elections
Rhode Island House of Representatives
82 Smith St
Providence, RI 02903

March 9th, 2026

Honorable Evan P. Shanley and Members of the House Committee on State Government & Local Elections, My name is LaJuan Allen, and I am the Executive Director of Vote16USA. [Vote16USA](#) is a national organization that supports efforts to extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds on the local and state levels, helps start new local campaigns, and elevates the issue's prominence on a national level. I am writing to testify in strong support of the House Bill 7091, which will allow citizens of a city or town who are at least sixteen (16) years of age to register to vote and to vote in school committee elections in municipalities where school committees are elected entities.

We have an opportunity to strengthen our democracy by giving students a voice in the decisions that directly impact their education. Research demonstrates that 16- and 17-year-olds are not only capable of participating in elections, but they are also highly motivated to do so. A [2020 study](#) from Tufts University's CIRCLE found that 16- and 17-year-olds exhibit political awareness comparable to older voters, and they are eager to engage in the democratic process when provided the opportunity. Furthermore, countries like Austria and Scotland, which have lowered the voting age, [report positive outcomes](#), including high voter turnout and sustained engagement in subsequent elections. House Bill 7091 will amplify the voices of thousands of students in Rhode Island.

There are already 15 jurisdictions nationwide that allow 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in local elections. Takoma Park, Maryland has successfully allowed 16-year-olds to vote in municipal elections since 2013, with [participation rates surpassing 75%](#). Takoma Park's experience provides compelling evidence of success: in the first election after the change, turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds exceeded that of any other age group. Since then, similar initiatives in California, New Jersey, Vermont, and even 22 countries including Brazil and Argentina have demonstrated that engaging younger voters builds a more representative & participatory democracy. This experience underscores the capacity and ability of young voters to contribute meaningfully to civic life.

Research in developmental psychology and neuroscience supports lowering the voting age to 16, as 16- and 17-year-olds [possess the cold cognitive abilities necessary for informed decision-making in elections](#). Cold cognition—the deliberate, reasoned thinking used in situations that allow time for reflection, such as voting—is fully developed by age 16. Studies show that adolescents at this age can process information, evaluate consequences, and make rational choices on par with adults. Lowering the voting age aligns with scientific understanding of adolescent decision-making and strengthens democracy by fostering lifelong civic participation at a critical developmental stage.

House Bill 7091 fulfills the promise of our democracy while giving students a voice in the community. As a representative of Vote16USA, we ask that you strongly support HB 7091 and pass it out of committee.

With hope,
LaJuan Allen
Executive Director of Vote16USA