

To the House Committee on State Government and Elections:

My name is Maeve Wiesen and I am a student at Brown University. As a member of the College Democrats of Rhode Island and Brown College Democrats, I am writing in support of H. 5635, to lower the voting age in Rhode Island from 18 to 16.

Policy impacts everyone, not just those over the age of 18. Decisions about so many issues, such as education, the environment, and specific issues like parental consent for abortion care, impact children and teenagers. They deserve to have some sort of say in the conversation, given their stake in it is so high.

We have seen in recent years that 16 and 17 year olds have amazing organizational capacities, and political comprehensive skills that at the very least compare to those of lots of adults. Organizations such as the March for Our Lives and student organizing around political candidates all highlight that teenagers not only care about these issues that impact them, but they take action. For these teenagers, calling their legislators and voicing their opinions should be meaningful action, but instead their voices often fall of deaf ears because they are not voters.

I am 22 now, but I remember the sense of helplessness that I felt as a 16 year old when decisions were being made for me by people who had no personal stake in my school and my world. Gun violence, climate change, and LGBT rights were just a few of the issues I felt strongly about and was knowledgeable about, but I could do little to influence policy. I remember the first time I voted, I felt as though I had power over my life and future. Moreover, that power motivated me to stay informed and aware of politics and the choices that my elected officials were making. Giving 16 and 17 year olds the right to vote will not encourage them to joke around and abuse the power- it will encourage them to be engaged because they hold power.

To put it plainly: 16 and 17 year olds are smart and competent, and these issues impact them as much as adults. We need to give them voices in government.

I strongly urge the committee to vote in favor of passage for House Bill 5635. Thank you for reading and considering my testimony.