

Written Testimony of  
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Submitted to the New York State Senate Committee on Elections "To Review Elections Administration and Voting Rights in New York State."

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I would like to thank Brendan Cushing, the Director of Programming for Generation Vote (GenVote), the National Youth Rights Association for helping me testify today, and this committee for letting me testify. Generation Vote sparks an intersectional youth-led movement that fights for our right to vote and a just democracy for all. At NYRA, we are working on creating a movement and spreading awareness on the importance of youth rights, including the lowering of the voting age to 16. As a 17 year-old, I have found it to be difficult to express myself because voting for what I believe in is simply not possible. I am in support of lowering the voting age to 16 because I think that it is a crucial step in maintaining a fair democracy.

Voting is one of the most important aspects of democracy, yet a large population of able teens are left out of this because they can't vote. According to Vote16USA<sup>1</sup>, young people who are 16 to 17 years old have the necessary civic knowledge to vote, and there is not much of a difference in these skills from voters of the age of 18. Lowering the voting age will also increase the civic discipline and education among people who are 16 and 17 because they will need to learn what they are voting for and who they think best represents their ideas.

Starting to vote at the age of 16 would also start a good habit for youth to know how to vote and continue this habit for the rest of their lives. Voter turnout among the age group of 18-29 in New York City increased by 3.4% from the 2016 to the 2020 elections, despite the profound difficulties that COVID-19 presented, according to *Amny Newsletter*<sup>2</sup>. However, only 48% of eligible voters of this age group voted in the 2016 elections, according to the *New York Times*<sup>3</sup>. That poor turnout could be the result, at least in part, of not knowing how to vote and not understanding basic procedures. If teens were empowered with this basic knowledge about voting procedures, once they were away in college, voting would not be as difficult for them and therefore turnout for college-age students would likely be much higher. In Takoma Park, a suburb of Washington D.C., the voting age was lowered to 16 and the turnout rate exceeded every other demographic in the city's 2013 and 2015 elections, and quadrupled the overall average of voter turnout, according to vox<sup>4</sup>. This bodes very well for long term commitment for long term responsibility.

Teens of the age of 16 and 17 are also impacted by political issues just like eligible voters are. They can work untimed hours and pay taxes, a clear case of taxation without representation. In New York teens can also start driving when they turn 16, and can be tried in court as an adult. 16 and 17 year olds are required to be in school, yet they cannot vote on school policies.

In school elections for student-held positions, I have seen everyone voting excitedly to vote for the people they believe in and interested in finding out who stands for what. Since 16 and 17 year olds cannot vote, this has been the only time I have experienced voting, but I think the enthusiasm that teens have when casting their school ballots will carry over to official elections and voting. Also, during my Syracuse University Project Advance American history class, my teacher asked us students why we should not be able to vote. None of us were able to come up with any reasons, and the entire class got excited because we felt like we should have say in legislation that actually affects us.

I want to thank the committee for giving me this opportunity to testify. In conclusion, I think that 16 year olds are fully capable of voting, and given the chance would strengthen our democracy in terms of voting. 16 year olds would be able to start the habit of voting at an easier time in their life, and could have an actual decision on policies and who they believe should be in power. I urge the committee to vote in favor of the NY Senate Bill A611 / S478

1: <https://vote16usa.org/reasons-for-lowing-voting-age-16/>

2 :

<https://www.amny.com/news/young-new-york-city-voters-went-to-the-polls-in-2020-election-analysis-finds/>

3 : <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/08/upshot/youth-voting-2020-election.html>

4 : <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2016/11/7/13347080/voting-age-election-16>