



May 2, 2023

Members of the House Education Committee,

The [Delaware Voting Rights Coalition](#), the first statewide coalition of voting rights organizations and advocates comprised of 40 organizations and numerous individuals, urges you to vote YES on HB 96, which would allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in school board elections.

Students are uniquely qualified to weigh in on school board elections, given they have the most direct experience with the impact of policy and budget decisions as they've spent their entire childhoods inside of those schools. They have firsthand knowledge of what is working well and what needs improvement and have a vested interest in making sure their schools remain strong.

This bill will instill the value of civic responsibility in a new generation of Delaware voters by empowering young people to develop the habit of voting at an early age. Like a learner's permit, this bill introduces students to the voting process in a local, nonpartisan election – a teachable moment done with the support of teachers and parents.

HB 96 builds on currently existing Delaware law. The First State, as well as many other states, already allows 17-year-olds to vote in primary elections if they will turn 18 by the date of the general election. Moreover, Delaware already allows 16- and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote prior to becoming eligible to vote, as do almost half of all states. Allowing young people to vote in school board elections is a logical next step.

There are numerous reasons why it makes sense to let 16-year-olds vote. First, studies show that 16-year-olds are just as capable as 18-year-olds when it comes to choosing between two candidates in an election. Second, the 16th year is generally far less tumultuous than the 18th, when young people are focused on major life changes like beginning college or joining the workforce. Permitting 16-year-olds to vote would support habit formation among young people who are strongly connected to their local community before they move out of their parents' home and likely begin a decade-long period of geographic mobility that contributes significantly to low voter participation among young adults.

Society already recognizes the 16th year as a point of maturity. At 16, young people can start working without a permit and obtain a driver's license. Working 16- and 17-year-olds pay taxes on their earnings. They are also old enough to petition the Court for emancipation.

If Delaware's goal is encouraging voters to participate in upholding the cornerstone of our democracy, then HB 96 is a step in the right direction.

The Delaware Voting Rights Coalition encourages you to vote yes on HB 96 and allow Delaware House members to have a full debate on the merits of the bill.

Sincerely,

The Delaware Voting Rights Coalition