

SUB TO 2025 RES-001 (PROPOSED-FRIES)

URGING THE ~~STATE OF WISCONSIN~~ LEGISLATURE TO INITIATE A LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL STUDY ON HOW TO IMPROVE YOUTH VOTING PARTICIPATION IN WISCONSIN TO LOWER THE VOTING AGE TO 16 YEARS OLD FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT ELECTIONS

The Dane County Board of Supervisors requests and strongly urges the Wisconsin State Legislature to ~~pass a joint resolution to place a constitutional amendment on the ballot altering the state constitution to allow call for a Wisconsin Legislative Council study examining the participation of youth voters in elections and providing policy recommendations for improving and potentially expanding youth voting participation for sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds to cast votes in local school district elections.~~

It is well documented that voters between 18 and 29 years of age have consistently had the lowest turnout among all age groups in U.S. presidential elections, and often even lower turnout levels in local elections. Less than 20% of eligible voters voted in Wisconsin's spring primary held on February 18, 2025. Civic engagement and voter turnout are key pillars of our democracy and they are currently under threat on all governmental levels. We must make efforts to reverse disenfranchisement that leads to erosion of democratic systems. This primary included choices for local school board seats and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Lowering the voting age to 16 years old in local school district elections would fortify key supports of our democracy, such as civic engagement and voter turnout, which currently are under threat on all governmental levels.

More research is warranted to understand steps and initiatives that could motivate young voters to take civic action. These initiatives might include engagement strategies focusing specifically on youth, early education, community influence, social media, and technology, as well as state and local policy changes and grassroots efforts that improve youth voter engagement and access. To address specific issues already identified in Wisconsin, a Legislative Council study should include but not be limited to research and recommendations on:

- University of Wisconsin changes to the Wiscard to make it Voter ID compliant
- Ensuring adequate and accessible campus polling locations are available
- Registration and residency requirements that act as barriers to youth voting
- Reducing voting age to include 16-and 17-year-olds

The goal of this Legislative Council study would be to create a data-driven, comprehensive set of recommendations for spurring civic engagement in the electoral process by current and next generations of youth voters in Wisconsin.

In recent years, scholars and policymakers have considered whether the U.S. minimum voting age should be changed to 16 years of age and a growing body of research is showing that 16- and 17-year-olds have the cognitive ability and reasoning on political issues to be able to make their own political decisions. But changing the voting age is an approach that must be examined within a larger context that explains lower participation rates among already currently-eligible youth voters. A Legislative Council study focused on this topic would send the message that youth have a place in politics and a civic right and duty that should start early and endure throughout their lives.

~~Lowering the voting age can drive further demand for more robust civic education in schools. The combination of a lower voting age and better civics education could dramatically boost civic engagement, increase voter turnout, and strengthen our democracy in the long run. Positive habits started in the earlier adolescent years have a better chance of extending into adulthood. Research shows voting in one election can increase the probability that a person will vote in the next election. Enacting a lower voting age also~~policy changes and initiatives shown to improve youth voter access and engagement would bolster routine democratic participation. ~~would send the message that youth have a place in politics, instilling a sense of civic duty that would endure throughout their lives.~~

~~Sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds have valuable input on the education system gained from daily experiences with the system. Having been through elementary, middle, and high school, these students represent the interests of multiple grade levels of students; yet, their voices are not reflected in the school district elections that directly affect their educational experiences.~~

~~Since 2017, high school students are required by Wisconsin state law, Wis. Stat. §118.33 (1m) (a), to pass a civics exam and will be required to take a civics class to graduate. These requirements will ensure that high school students have access to instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizens, including the voting process.~~

~~Lowering the voting age can drive further demand for more robust civic education in schools. The combination of a lower voting age and better civics education could dramatically boost civic engagement, increase voter turnout, and strengthen our democracy in the long run. Positive habits started in the earlier adolescent years have a better chance of extending into adulthood. Research shows voting in one election can increase the probability that a person will vote in the next election. Enacting a lower voting age also would send the message that youth have a place in politics, instilling a sense of civic duty that would endure throughout their lives.~~

~~Less than 20% of eligible voters voted in Wisconsin's spring primary held on February 18, 2025. This primary included choices for local school board seats and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Lowering the voting age to 16 years old in local school district elections would fortify key supports of our democracy, such as civic engagement and voter turnout, which currently are under threat on all governmental levels.~~

~~Similar initiatives have been successful abroad. Austria, Estonia, and Malta have lowered the voting age to 16 for all elections, and other countries such as Scotland, Wales, and 11 of Germany's states have lowered the voting age to 16 for local elections.~~

~~In the United States, the California cities of Berkeley and Oakland lowered the voting age for school board elections and had over 600 youth voters in their first school board elections under this new voting provision. Five other cities in Maryland and cities in Vermont and New Jersey have also passed initiatives to lower the voting age for school board elections. The momentum for this change in communities across the U.S. is building.~~

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Dane County Board of Supervisors requests and strongly urges the Wisconsin Legislature to initiate a Legislative Council study on how to improve youth voting participation in Wisconsin, which researches, among other things, making changes to the University of Wisconsin Wiscard to make it Voter ID compliant, provision of

adequate and accessible campus polling locations, registration and residency requirements that act as barriers to youth voting, and reducing voting age to include 16-and 17-year-olds. ~~elect~~ elected officials in the State of Wisconsin to support the passage of a constitutional amendment to permit 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in local school district elections if such voters are citizens of the United States who have resided in the school district for at least 30 days preceding the school district election.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Dane County Board encourages other local governments to support and request a Legislative Council study to advance youth voter engagement.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be sent to Governor Tony Evers and, the Dane County State Legislative Delegation, ~~and, all Dane County School Districts.~~