

Testimony of Jennifer McGill, 17, of Pawtucket, on H 7104
House Judiciary Committee
March 5th, 2008

I would first like to thank the committee for hearing my testimony and my State representative, J. Patrick O'Neill, for introducing the bill.

For my Capstone Project at Tolman High School, I thought that I would get more young people to register to vote and get them to vote. But in my research I learned an interesting thing – nine states allow 17 year olds the opportunity to vote in a primary as long as that voter will be 18 on Election Day. Those states include Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio and Virginia. Our own neighboring state of Connecticut is also considering such legislation. In addition, if you are 17 and are going to be 18 by November you may participate in the Iowa caucuses.

Many countries, including Austria, Brazil, Cuba, Nicaragua and Germany allow young people to vote at the age of 16,

I think that allowing 17 year olds to vote in a primary for which they will be allowed to vote in the General Election will do several things:

- It will increase voter turnout and interest among young voters.
- If you can get a 17 year old to the polls you are more likely to see that young person vote in every election.

It's important to note the United State Constitution does not say that states cannot lower the voting age (for special circumstance as this) but states cannot raise the voting age.

Now why should you as legislators pass this bill?

- 17 year olds can enlist in the armed forces but they cannot pick who they want in a primary.
- Most 17 year olds hold jobs and thus are paying taxes and state fees.
- 17 year olds are working on political campaigns and look forward to actually participating in the electoral process.
- Last but not least, it is just a question of fairness.

While doing my research for this bill I had the opportunity to meet with Secretary of State Ralph Mollis. Secretary Mollis has pledged his support for my efforts and the bill.

In closing, I ask that this committee give this bill serious consideration and thought. The young people of our state, at least the soon to be 18 year olds, deserve a voice in our electoral process and I will hope that you will look favorably upon this bill.