



FairVote RI
145 Wayland Ave, Providence, RI 02906
Ph: (401) 529-3982 * Fax: 360.933.2456
ari@fairvote.org * www.fairvote.org/ri

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Dear Senators and Representatives:

Allowing voters to pre-register to vote at 16 is a common sense, non-partisan policy, with broad and ever growing support in Rhode Island. FairVote commends the Assembly's work in passing this measure in 2006 and 2007. **Now, we hope the Assembly will again take up the cause of youth engagement by voting S 2081 out of committee and supporting it on the floor.**

The Registration Gap: In the 2004 election, 81 percent of registered 18-25 year olds voted. But less than 60% of young people were registered. The registration gap, illustrated in the accompanying chart, is the "key difference" in lower youth participation, according to the US Census Bureau. **Youth voter pre-registration addresses the registration gap by creating clearer, simpler registration opportunities.**

Voting is a Habit: Electoral analyses and academic studies have shown that past participation is a major factor in determining future participation. **When young people are registered they vote as soon as they are eligible, and start patterns of participation that are the heartbeat of democracy.**

Best Practices for Democracy: 16 and 17 year olds are driving, working and paying taxes. State law identifies youth civic engagement as a priority, for example through high school registration drives and civics courses. But the current, non-uniform registration age makes engagement less effective. Structured environments like schools and the DMV offer the prospect of cleaner registrations and more learning opportunities. **Pre-registration would make the process simpler and more systematic for students and administrators catch more young people at the DMV, and help tie civics education directly to participation through pre-registration.**

Broad Support: Hawaii, Florida, and Puerto Rico allow 16 year olds to pre-register to vote. Other states, like Oregon and Maine, allow pre-registration for 17 year olds. This reform is also being considered in Maryland, Michigan and California. **This legislation has been passed by both Houses of the Rhode Island General Assembly twice, in 2006 and 2007, and has over 26 local endorsers** including the RI AFL-CIO, Common Cause RI, Youth in Action, the Brown College Republicans and the Rhode Island Young Democrats.

Again, thank you for your support and leadership on this issue. With so many young people tuning in to politics and democracy in 2008, FairVote believes that every member of the General Assembly can be proud to support this measure.

Best,

Ari Savitzky,
FairVote RI Director