



The Center for
Voting and Democracy

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Dear Representative or Senator:

Unfortunately, H 6215, a bill which would have enabled 16 and 17 year olds to pre-register to vote, did not come up for an over-ride vote after the governor's veto. FairVote wants to thank the Representatives and Senators who supported this legislation, again, for your time and efforts. We also hope to continue the conversation with those who were not able to support it.

We look forward to the bill's re-introduction, and hope to earn your increased support for engaging youth in our democracy.

Advance voter registration – the practice of registering voters before they are eligible – **is quickly becoming the national standard**. It is a non-partisan policy with support across the country, and is law in Maine, Minnesota, Florida and Oregon, to name a few. In fact, Rhode Island currently allows a limited form of advance voter registration: young people can register if they will be 18 by Election Day.

So while our current system allows campaigns and interested parties to register young voters within an election cycle in which they can participate, it doesn't do much to **engage young people more broadly** in the lifelong responsibility they are about to take up. Registering 16 and 17 year olds in **structured environments** like schools and the DMV makes voter registration accurate, and also makes it more official.

Participating in **democracy is a right and a responsibility**. Whether you believe registering and voting within the current system is too easy or too hard, there is a clear value in emphasizing civic responsibility to young people on the threshold of suffrage, many of whom are already **working and paying taxes**. This is a policy that we believe every member of the General Assembly could be proud to support.

In the coming months, FairVote will increase **grassroots support** for advance voter registration, and we will expand the network of organizations and groups that support this measure. **Endorsing organizations** already include the RI AFL-CIO, Clean Water Action, AFSCME Council 94, Ocean State Action, Youth in Action, RI PIRG, the NEARI, Teamster Local 257, the Brown College Republicans and many others.

We will also continue making the **powerful common sense arguments** that make this bill such a good one: that pre-registration enables more young people to vote as soon as they are eligible, and could increase long-term participation rates; that enabling 16 and 17 year olds to register provides more opportunities for young people to ask questions and get educated; and, that pre-registration could be achieved effectively while maintaining the integrity of the voter list..

We look forward to working with you in the coming months, and thank you again for your time and support.

Best regards,

Ari Savitzky
FairVote Rhode Island Director

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