



The Connecticut Young Democrats

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Testimony before the Government Administration and Elections Committee

HJ 21

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Senator Slossberg, Representative Caruso, Senator Freedman, Representative Hetherington and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Mae Flexer and I am the Vice-President of Political Affairs for the Connecticut Young Democrats. I am here to support House Joint Resolution 21, a Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Allow 17 Year Old Persons Who Will Be 18 Years of Age at the Next Regular Election to Vote in Primaries Related to Such Election. I am here before you today not as a partisan advocate but as an advocate for increased youth involvement in the electoral process. As a person who first became politically active as a high school student, I know the impact early involvement can have. This year our state has seen unprecedented young voter turnout during the presidential primaries. Allowing 17 year olds to participate in primaries before their first general election can only increase young voter interest and their investment in the election process. There are many young people who have been inspired by this year's campaign. In fact, the youth vote has been decisive in the campaign thus far. By allowing 17 year olds to vote in primaries, our state would be sending a decisive message supporting youth activism in our electoral process.

Some may argue that this resolution would benefit one party over another. However, 17 year olds would have to choose a party in order to participate in a primary in Connecticut. This would inevitably increase enrollment for both major parties. The results of primaries affect each individual party and therefore would provide no partisan benefit in general election outcomes to either major party. Also, allowing young people to vote at an earlier age will increase the likelihood that they will continue to vote throughout their lives. If a 17 year old is mature enough to drive, to have a job and to enlist in the military, then she or he is certainly capable of making a decision in a primary.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, eleven states currently permit 17 year olds to vote in a primary; Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon and Virginia. Connecticut would take a vast step forward in increasing the involvement of thousands of young people in our elections if this resolution is passed. I urge you to support House Joint Resolution 21. Thank you for your time and your consideration.