

<CR_3902 Attachment 1>

August 16, 2016

Honourable Premier Rachel Notley
Office of the Premier
307 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B6

Honourable Danielle Larivee
Office of the Minister of Municipal Affairs
204 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B6

Dear Premier Notley and Minister Larivee:

We are writing to inform The Government of Alberta that on February 3rd, 2016, the City of Edmonton Youth Council voted to publicly support the amendment of the Local Authorities Elections Act and the lowering of the municipal voting age to 16. We felt this issue was necessary to speak on as it will greatly empower the youth we work to serve.

Youth in Edmonton have proven they are ready for this change. Sixteen-year-olds already have rights permitting them to drive on city roads, be emancipated and live on their own, be in the army reserves, and be a parent, among many others. Through being able to handle these responsibilities youth have shown not only that they are ready but that they are competent in municipal issues.

Youth in Edmonton have further proven to be sufficiently aware of municipal issues, necessary to make an informed voting decision. Sixteen year-olds use city roads, facilities, transit and services making them aware of the fundamental operations that comprise municipal budgets and council decisions. In addition, youth are taught the importance of voting as well as the functions of municipal government in their schools. With the current age of 18, many youth are out of the classroom environment before a municipal election in which they are eligible to vote. Sixteen and 17 year olds are in an educational environment that is more conducive to voting.

This method has been successful elsewhere. Austria lowered the national voting age to 16 in 2007. In their 2013 parliamentary election, they witnessed significantly higher turnout among the 16 and 17-year-olds than the 18 to 21-year-olds. This same pattern occurred in a variety of regional elections in Norway and again in Scotland where the United Kingdom Electoral Commission estimated 75 percent voter turnout among the 16 and 17-year-olds in contrast with 54 percent among 18 to 24-year-olds. These numbers are significant as research has shown multiple times that when one votes in their first election they are more likely to become a lifelong voter. Through lowering the municipal voting age voter engagement and voter turnout can be vastly improved within a generation.

Research has consistently shown that youth are sufficiently competent and aware to vote. “Analyses of national survey data demonstrate that by 16 years of age—but not before— American adolescents manifest levels of development in each quality of citizenship [membership, concern for rights, and participation in society] that are approximately the same as those apparent in young American adults who are allowed to vote” (Daniel Hart & Robert Atkins, Rutgers University). In addition, a study from the University of Vienna indicates interest in politics is significantly higher amongst 16 and 17-year-olds than their 18 to 21-year-old counterparts. This demonstrates that youth want the right to vote and are able to handle the responsibilities associated with voting.

Through lowering the municipal voting age, the Government of Alberta will aid city councils across Alberta. With greater voter engagement it is ensured there will be greater public involvement in the political process; furthermore, candidates might be able to potentially run broader platforms and receive more of a focused mandate from their constituents.

The Government of Alberta would also be aiding school boards across Alberta. Through amending the Local Authorities Elections Act to lower the voting age for municipal elections, the voting age for school trustee elections would also be lowered. This is a logical change. Students who are still within the school system should be able to decide how their schools will be run. This is the most direct way to accomplish this. Moreover, this could benefit candidates as they will be able to focus their platforms more toward student issues.

The City of Edmonton Youth Council has recommended we forward this letter to the Premier of Alberta and the Minister of Municipal Affairs stating support for the amendment of the Local Authorities Elections Act to allow for 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote in municipal and school trustee elections.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Regards,

The City of Edmonton Youth Council Members

Marina Banister (Chair), Cameron Somerville (Vice-Chair), Alex MacRae-Korobkov, Ravina Anand, Thomas Banks, Kelly Bennett, Amy Boyd, Liza Chatterjee, Saga Darnell, Genna DiPinto, Tianna Leblanc, Angelika Matson, Kabir Nadkarni, Jo Picard, Marlene Rong, Armaan Somani, Quinten Starko, Jasmine Wang, Lauren White

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