

Statement of
Rep. _____
Speaker of the House

Before the
Michigan House of Representatives

At a Hearing Entitled
“Lowering the Voting Age”

Presented
July 27, 2022

Voting is not a Divine Right

First, we must establish some important background information. There is a general misconception common among Americans on both sides of the political aisle. There is a tendency to believe that voting is the divine destiny of all citizens, and the fewest possible restrictions should be placed on the practice. We labor under the delusion that our democracy is healthier when more people “participate.” We put together voting drives and entice as many human beings as we can to the polls, urging — no, demanding — that they all vote, no matter how uninformed they might be, or how little they otherwise contribute to society. We have in our heads a vision of America as a harmonious utopia governed by an oblivious mob of millions.

Voting is not a Mystical rite that we all must partake in. We do not allow children, felons, or the institutionalized to vote. The health of our nation certainly does not rest on our ability to shovel warm bodies into the voting booth. The reality is the exact opposite. Voting is a tool, not a sacrament. We use it to select the ones who will pass laws and make important decisions. We should protect the process and treat it with respect. We desire informed voters (regardless of political persuasion), not mindless automatons.

The Good Old Days (Our Generation isn’t Mature Enough)

A bit more background about the history behind The Franchise - the ability to vote. According to David Davenport of the Hoover Institution, the last time the voting age was changed nationally was in 1971, with the adoption of the 26th Amendment to the Constitution. With 18-year-olds fighting in Vietnam, it seemed wrong to say they couldn’t vote for their national leaders until they were 21. In other words, there was a serious, compelling reason to make the change. The same cannot be said here. If anything, 16- and 17-year-olds are less mature in 2022 than in 1921, let alone 1971.

In our day and age of social media addictions, failing public schools, and disintegrating family structures, young people have been let down. The expectations for them have sunk lower and lower. My grandfather grew up farming in backcountry Indiana. I’m sure many of your grandparents and great-grandparents grew up similarly. Their generation of young people had real responsibility and real work ethic. They milked the cows, plowed the fields with their parents, and harvested the crops AND then went to school when they had time. They weren’t subjected to the social engineering of Tik Tok or the faux realities of Instagram. They had a firm grasp on what was real and what was fake. If these were the 16- and 17-year-olds we are talking about voting, I’d add a hearty amen! to the chorus. But they aren’t. There still are responsible, hard-working, and informed teenagers out there, but you must squint to find them. Overall, if we were to do anything on the voting age, it should be to raise it.

16/17 Year Olds Don't have Skin in the Game

In an ideal world, I would raise the voting age to at least 23. The idea is to open voting to people who are full, contributing members of society. Most people under the age of 23 have never supported themselves. They've never even paid a bill or filed their taxes. They know very little about how the country actually works. And they contribute little if anything to it financially, which means they are going into the voting booth and deciding what happens to other people's money. They have no skin in the game themselves. Ideally, the only citizens who vote would be married people, or single people who support themselves. Neither of those conditions is normal among 16–17-year-olds and thus I'd argue shouldn't be permitted to vote.

Politically Unpopular

Another reason to oppose this bill is straightforward: the voters don't want it. The vast majority of Americans of all ages and political views agree that 16-year-olds should not be given the right to vote. A 2019 Hill-HarrisX poll found that 84% of registered voters opposed lowering the voting age to 16. The poll found every age group was against 16-year-olds voting, **with the most support found among those under 35 where still only 39% were in favor.**

A Twitter poll by WJLA, the ABC news affiliate in Washington, DC, found just 18% support for a proposed bill to lower the voting age to 16 in the District of Columbia, compared to 77% against. The local NBC news affiliate ran a similar poll online in which 83% of participants were against the bill. A different survey found 8% support for lowering the voting age to 16; 45% want to keep it at 18; and 46% would like to raise it back to age 21.

Not surprisingly perhaps, other legal age thresholds have been going up, not down. The drinking age is 21, as is the age to obtain a handgun. The age when young people may drive a car without any conditions has now increased to 17 or 18 by most state laws, not 16. In other words, the law has moved toward greater maturity before responsibility, not less.

Trickle up Effect Marginal

One of the common arguments you'll hear from supporters of HB 6183 is the "Trickle up" effect. They claim that if 16 year olds vote, their parents will be **substantially** more likely to be engaged in the voting process. However, that isn't quite clear.

Take it from Jens Olav Dahlgard, an assistant professor in political science at the Copenhagen Business School. She, herself believes that lowering the voting age would be a positive thing. Despite this, even she found that parents with voting-age children at home are only about 4 percent more likely to vote compared to their peers. 4% is statistically insignificant. It is even more so when you consider that this research was conducted upon families in Denmark (a much more socially homogenous group than Americans) and doesn't have any trustworthy way of measuring the quality of the vote being cast by parents and teens in Denmark. Were they informed voters, or mindless automatons simply following the path of the culture.

Upon Further Review

In conclusion, I think Major League Baseball replay reviews have a good standard for changing things like the question of voting age. Unless the review shows "indisputable video evidence" that the play on the field was called incorrectly, the call stands. We don't need "indisputable" evidence in this case, but how about some evidence that the majority of American teens are knowledgeable and educated on the issues? How about some evidence that Americans believe this is a good idea? How about some evidence that Zoomers don't overwhelmingly loathe America as a racist, bigoted country steeped in misogyny? It's just not there.

I thank you brother and sister representatives for your time and now stand open for questions.

An Addendum for Fisking

Pro HB 6183: No major brain differences between 16/17 and 18 year olds

Studies through neuroimaging suggest that human brain development of the prefrontal cortex does not fully occur until the early 20's or later according to the Journal of Adolescent Health (2010). Several NIH studies have noted development not being fully complete until the early-mid 30's in some adults. Voting age should be 35 if this is when human brains are fully developed.

The executive functioning that is housed in the frontal lobe of the human brain helps us with decision making. What is the baseline for decision-making maturity and who determines that? Should lawmakers be discounting the responsibility of 16 and 17 years when fully developed but uninformed adults often cast ballots for nonsensical reasons?

Rebuttal: This argument works in reverse. If there are no appreciable differences between 16- and 18-year-olds, why not raise the voting age so we increase the maturity of our voting population? At some point, we have to draw the line somewhere and there will be an element of arbitrariness. If we drew the line at 16, why not 15-year-olds? Why not 14-year-olds? They're not very different from 16-year-olds. You have to draw the line somewhere, and if we're going to be redrawing the lines, they should be older, and not younger.

Pro HB 6183: Young Historical Figures

Decision-making is not only a skill for 18 and up. There are very competent young people who have influenced and inspired generations across history: Joan of Arc (17), Annie Oakley (16), Alexander The Great (took the throne at 16).

Rebuttal: This sentiment is writ large correct. Young people are capable of doing much more than modern society allows or even encourages. However, all the examples named above are the exceptions to the rule. They are historical anomalies. We're not asking if Alexander the Great or Joan of Arc should vote (they should). We're asking should your average 16-year-old vote. Your average 16-year-old is not Annie Oakley or Alexander the Great.

Pro HB 6183: Some 16-Year-olds work longer 40 year olds & Some are Married

There are 16-year-olds who work longer hours than 40 years old. If 16-year-olds are paying into Social Security and Medicare, why are they not being given the same legal recognition as the individuals receiving SS and Medicare Benefits from the young person's labor? Additionally, 16-year-olds can marry and be parents

*Rebuttal: Similar to the prior argument, we're not asking if **some** 16-year-olds have a great work ethic and some 40 year olds are bums. We're asking about both groups of people broadly speaking. Broadly speaking, most 16-year-olds aren't supporting themselves and filing their own income taxes and raising their kids like 40 year olds are.*

16-Year-olds have Adult Responsibilities

16-year-olds are responsible enough to drive. Cars are lethal. Every year, 40,000 people die in crashes (NBC News, Health and Technology, 10/24/21). Isn't driving more dangerous than voting? In both scenarios, drivers are responsible for both their own lives and the lives of countless others.

Rebuttal: This is the strongest argument in favor of lowering the voting age. However, as mentioned previously, many states are raising the minimum age of drivers to 17 or 18. Why? Because 16- and 17-year-olds tend to drive more recklessly and get into more wrecks than young adults just 3 years older than them.

Age isn't a guarantee of mental capability

In 2021, The Alzheimer's Association estimated that a whopping 40% of people aged 65 or older in the USA have associated memory impairment, almost 16 million people. If a primary reason for keeping the voting age at 18 is cognitive development (particularly executive functioning/decision making) then citizens over 65 should be tested every two years for cognitive deficit and have their voting card revoked if they do not meet the cut score for dementia.

Rebuttal: This is more of an argument for a mandatory civics exam than for lowering the voting age. We seem to agree that we want mature, responsible, and informed people electing our leaders. You don't get that by allowing old folks with Alzheimer's or young people with Tik Tok voting - that's how you get a geriatric President.