

25 July 2018

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Lowering Voting Age And Increasing Voter Participation) Bill 2018

I'd like to thank the Joint Committee on Electoral Matters for accepting submissions into the enquiry regarding the lowering of the voting age to 16 years.

The question of the voting age being lowered is extremely controversial for fair reasons, but it is the best choice to make non-compulsory voting available at age 16.

Young people can engage in politics from an early age; from campaigning, to being members of party branches. If we extend them these opportunities, why should they not vote?

Further, young people are impassioned about issues that will affect them. It is absolutely absurd to allow people who are unaware of the developments of society for young people to vote on these issues, totally disregarding any opinions that young people may have on certain ideas. If an issue is irrelevant to an older voter, for example, youth engagement policy, why should they have the only impact when it comes to the potential livelihoods of young people. I would not necessarily trust a 50-year-old with no children and no exposure to children to make decisions regarding the environment in which I grow up, hence it is vital that we allow young people to have voices that are heard and acknowledged, thus helping to shape appropriate policy. We must allow young people to vote for people with their best interests, just as we allow older people to. The safety and trust this will bring is vital in making sure the government works effectively for the foreseeable future, when these young voters become adults and are making decisions from an inevitably better-informed position.

A huge argument against this proposed change is that "young people are dumb and unaware", however I find this to be remarkably misleading. The young people that are most likely to vote are more politically aware than most adults who are forced to vote. I have a remarkably strong passion for politics at just 17, watching bill debates, and question time, reading Hansard when I miss important information, and attending conferences, lectures, and programs that will increase my ability to effectively engage; but the same cannot be said for my parents. They resent voting, and put a 1 next to whoever's name appears at the top of the ballot. I fail to understand why the laziness of older people gets put before the passion of those of us who are younger. I want to make an informed choice, having examined each movement of all candidates closely, but I am not allowed, and my parents

can make a quick few marks, go get a sausage sizzle, and be none the wiser about the decision they have just made, which could potentially put people at risk.

Moreover, on the issue of lack of education, the change would create a further advancement in engagement for young people in politics. The lowered voting age would introduce young people to the importance of voting in maintaining an efficient democracy, and would assist young people earlier in understanding how to vote, therefore reducing the number of tainted votes when they are at the compulsory age. If the voting age were to change to 16, and for the voting to be optional, would also assist students in applying practical understanding and logical thinking. They are required to examine and understand policy and candidates to make a beneficial decision for themselves, which is incredibly empowering. As they feel more encouraged to have their voices heard, and more empowered because of this, they will engage more with policy makers and hence we will be able to construct a more efficient youth strategy, both on state and federal levels.

Engagement in politics from young people is poor, and this is because we feel we are left out of sight and out of mind by the politicians whose job it is to give a voice to our communities. We do not become an irrelevant member of a community because we are young, but rather we are the foundation of effective growth and change, to better the areas in which we live. If the voting age is decreased, it is inevitably going to result in a positive change in political engagement, and thus a positive change for all electorates across the nation.

Having participated in Youth Parliament, I can say that you will never hear a more impassioned bill debate than those that young people have. We as young people want nothing more than to represent and battle for what we know needs to change for the betterment of Australia. We that have opportunities such as Youth Parliament are incredibly lucky, because we have a chance for our voices to be heard by the state government on certain issues, but this engagement still limits the amount of voice we have on the multitude of issues we couldn't include in our bills, because of the length of the program. We had the privilege of standing for what we feel people believe in, but we can't truly know without a voting demographic! This is exactly the problem with having the voting age at 18; we do not have a full demographic of voters with the relevant experiences for many issues.

It is time for young people to have the chance to be heard, because we cannot effectively grow as a country without the input of our youth. Australia will stay an old nation that lacks the ability to follow social change of its big allies if we continue to refuse people based on their age. With age comes wisdom, this is true, but with youthfulness comes passion, heart, and desire.

Change starts with the people, including those that are young.

Yours Sincerely,

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