



ENCOURAGING CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

Lowering the Voting Age In the Town of Chevy Chase

July 29, 2021

Current Voting Legal Framework

- Maryland Code provides the opportunity for municipalities to determine their own rules for voting in elections via its charter (Article XI-A SEC.3) “...provided that nothing herein contained shall be construed to authorize or empower the County Council of any County in this State to enact laws or regulations for any incorporated town, village, or municipality in said County, on any matter covered by the powers granted to said town, village, or municipality by the Act incorporating it, or any subsequent Act or Acts amendatory thereto....”
- Town Code Section 403. Registration. “Voters may register for town elections according to such rules and regulations as may be established by the council from time to time.” (Res. No. 07-16, § 1, 1-9-08; Res. No. 18-2, § 1, 12-10-18, eff. 1-29-19)
- Today, 16-year-olds are allowed to be County Election Judges. So, they can oversee and assist voters as needed, but cannot vote themselves.

There is Local Precedent for Lowering the Age to 16

- Takoma Park – Passed in 2013
- Hyattsville – Passed in 2015
- Greenbelt – Unanimously Passed in 2018
- Riverdale Park – Passed in 2018
- Mount Rainier – Unanimously Passed in 2021

Potential Challenges and Clarifications to Consider

- Objection was that “laws have been in place for a long time and they should not be changed”. (Takoma Park)
- Objection was that residents should decide this change by a ballot vote instead of a Council vote.(Hyattsville)
- A charter amendment that Election Board members must be 18 years old.(Greenbelt)
- A charter amendment allowing same-day voter registration for municipal elections, regardless of citizenship status.(Riverdale Park)
- A charter amendment that clarifies that in order to run for the Council a person must be 18 years old the day their campaign paperwork is filed.(Mount Rainier)

Goals for Lowering Voting Age

- Developing voting habits before older teens leave for college. Research shows a person who votes in the first election they are eligible for is likely to continue voting consistently. 16 is a better time to establish a new habit than age 18. Data from the first two local elections in [Takoma Park](#) after 2013 showed that teen turnout was quadruple the average among all voters.
- Study comparing the qualities associated with voting, such as civic knowledge, political skills, and political interest, among citizens 18 and older versus citizens below 18 found no significant differences.
- There is an opportunity to develop informed and passionate civic participators by allowing all people above the age of 16 to vote

This is not a partisan issue, this is encouraging civic responsibility

The Proposal to the Town Council

For the May 2022 Town Election:

- Voters 16 years old and above that have a valid Maryland Drivers License and are registered to vote would participate.
- Parents would not be required to be present when their teen is voting.

Today, when a Town Election occurs, 16 and 17-year-olds who are registered are already included on the voter lists.

Are Older Teens Ready to Vote – Yes

- Most 10th grade history curriculums focus on the U.S. Constitution and Voting Rights. As a practice, voting is a fundamental act of civic participation through which young people can contribute to democracy. Elections offer frequent opportunities for civic engagement that can also serve as entry points to other forms of political and community participation.
- Many older teens not only have a drivers license but have jobs and pay taxes.
- Many older teens are becoming more aware of local government as well as global issues of climate change and local issues of traffic and pedestrian safety.