



March 28, 2021

Rep. Grier Hopkins
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Rep. Hopkins,

We are writing to express our support for House Bill 39: Voter Pre-Registration.

We know the importance of voting and promoting civic engagement. Allowing minors of at least 16 years of age to pre-register to vote will make it so that the State of Alaska recognizes this important duty and will also improve access and increase voter turnout. At least 13 other states throughout the country allow younger voters pre-registration abilities. It's time that Alaska joins in as well.

During the 2020 election cycle, our organization focused on educational outreach to new and first-time voters. This included individuals who had recently turned 18. Among those we connected with, very few were registered to vote, most were confused about the application process, and many felt the pressure of registering before the State's deadline. This gap in knowledge transcends party lines. The ability to register to vote should be made a consistent opportunity. We firmly believe that providing access at every entry point possible to the voting process should be taken, especially for youth living outside of urban centers.

Thank you for taking a leadership role in helping to activate Alaska's younger generations and working towards increasing civic engagement. We hope your colleagues will join you in this effort and bring HB 39 to final passage.

Gunalchéesh/Háw'aa/Quyana/Mahsi'/Baasee'/Maasee'/Dogedinh/Thank you,

Kendra Kloster
Executive Director
Native Peoples Action

HB 39 16-year-old voter pre-registration

Kids Voting is a voter-education program committed to developing the life-long habit of informed voting in students.

The opportunity to pre-register to vote at the age of 16 supports the likelihood of students voting in the future. If that pre-registration occurs in the context of a civics education class or through the Kids Voting program, students are more likely to make informed voting decisions.

Once young people have voted, they are statistically more likely to vote again, establishing a regular habit of voting. These young voters may also positively influence their parents and other adult family members to vote, thus increasing voter turnout.

At first glance, Alaska's system of automatically registering all recipients of Permanent Fund Dividends at voting age seems to be a solution to ensuring that citizens register to vote. However, it does not have the same impact as allowing 16-year-olds to personally pre-register, so they may be more fully invested in the voting process.

The late Senator John Lewis stated, *"The right to vote is precious, almost sacred. It is the most powerful nonviolent tool or instrument in a democratic society. We must use it."*

Peggy Carlson
President, Kids Voting North Alaska

To: Representative Claman, Representative Snyder, and Committee Members

My name is Amy Gallaway. I am a high school civics and CTE teacher in the Fairbanks Northstar Borough and the 2020 Alaska Teacher of the year. I am writing in support of HB39 "Voter Registration Age". As citizen legislators, you are acutely aware of the necessity of having an informed electorate that is representative of the entirety of the state and not just certain demographics. Allowing non-partisan early voter registration at 16 will empower students to more engaged citizens by demystifying the election process and making the registration process more relevant for more students. Academic studies from NCSL and electoral analyses show that voting behavior is habit-forming. It's important to engage prospective voters early on to create a habit of voting and civic engagement. After 22 years of teaching civics, I can unequivocally state the research is spot on. My students who vote in their first election at 18 or 19 continue to vote throughout their lives whereas my students who did not, are still trying to figure out 5 years later. Most interestingly, I find that my students who are able to register and vote while still in high school are more engaged in our local and state elections instead of only every 4 years for president.

Registration is a critical step to protecting the integrity of our elections, but it shouldn't be a barrier. While some say it is "easy", I can tell you from experience students find voter registration HARD and most parents don't teach it. Many parents do not vote, especially in local elections, so the education students get about registration and the electoral process comes almost entirely from the school curriculum. Schools are the perfect place to teach how to register to vote because we are already teaching the power and necessity of the vote. By lowering the registration age, teachers can provide the option for all students to register to vote alongside their civics lessons and preregistration drives can be designed to operate on an ongoing basis, even when there is no scheduled election, making learning relevant and empowering students. At West Valley High School, we hold an annual student-run local government candidate forum. It is usually school board or State House races. As a culminating activity, we then hold a schoolwide Kids Voting election. Many students find the election childish since it "doesn't count", even though it is important to teach the process of getting informed, election districts, and how to interact with the ballot. During this time we hold voter registration drives, but often only a handful of students qualify. With HB39 as law, more students each year could register and feel firsthand the importance of engaging the democratic process.

We need to increase youth voter turnout so the electorate represents all sectors of society better. Average voter turnout in annual municipal elections hovers between 15-21% and for state elections between 44-48%. In the 2018 election, only 6% of 18-24 year-olds voted. This is not just disheartening, it is unhealthy. Every year I ask students why they think people don't vote. They say, "One vote doesn't really matter, people don't care, and it is HARD to vote". Last year while teaching a lesson on public policy and voter turnout, I had a group of students goofing off. They were talking about the basketball game, their jobs, Snapchat, but definitely not voter turnout. I asked them, "Since young people vote in such low numbers, should the voting age be increased to thirty?" I thought this would outrage them. To my surprise, at least 15 students said, "Sure, it doesn't really matter anyway." Four students even offered to give up their vote altogether; they decided only the people who care should vote. This is the reality in most classrooms in Alaska. By allowing 16-year-olds to register to vote, educators can lower one barrier- how to register. Then use it alongside effective civics programs like Kids Voting, We the People, and iCivics. If we want to make elections fully representative, we need to make the distribution of voting costs and benefits independent of party lines. Simplified voter registration does that. 14 states, including Florida, Louisiana, Hawaii, and Oregon permit preregistration beginning at 16 years old. Alaska should be number 15 so our students can help save the republic.

Maida Buckley

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April 11, 2021

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony regarding HB39.

“A republic, if you can keep it.”

Ben Franklin’s now famous words spoken at the conclusion of the Constitution Convention in 1787 carry authenticity today. These words acknowledge the fragile nature of representative democracy that is dependent upon citizen participation. It is the government’s responsibility to protect and promote the right to participate, whether it is by speech, by petition, or by the vote. In this light, I support HB39’s providing a process of pre-registration for 16 year olds. By engaging young people in the election process, HB39 strengthens our democratic republic. Studies have shown that voter turnout is enhanced when voter registration is streamlined.

HB 39 instills in our youth the importance of voting to maintain democratic institutions and provides the foundation for creating a robust electorate, both principles guiding our founding fathers in their efforts to provide a strong and lasting democracy.

Sincerely,

Maida Buckley