

Apr 1, 2024

Dear Representative Story,

As a civics educator with 25 years of teaching experience in Alaska, I strongly support HB246 which would allow pre-registration of Alaskans at 16 years old. It will be a powerful accessory to increase informed youth voter turnout and act as a vehicle to increase family engagement with the electoral process.

Allowing non-partisan early voter registration at 16 will empower students to be more engaged citizens by demystifying the election process and making the registration process more relevant for more students. By lowering the registration age, schools can provide the opportunity for all students to register to vote alongside their civics lessons; preregistration drives can be designed to operate on an ongoing basis, even when there is no scheduled election, making learning relevant and empowering students. With this bill, schools across Alaska will be able to increase civic knowledge and skills, as well as, raise awareness and open even more avenues for family and community involvement. Making voter registration more supported for youth, while maintaining election integrity is a critical step in protecting representative government in Alaska. While some say registration is "easy", I can tell you students find voter registration confusing. Schools are the perfect place to teach how to register to vote because we already teach the power and necessity of voting.

Academic studies from NCSL and electoral analyses show that voting behavior is habit-forming. Engaging prospective voters early on is important to create a habit of voting and civic engagement. After 25 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 it out years later. Most interestingly, I find that my students who can register while still in high school are more engaged in our local and state elections instead of only every four years for president.

If we want to make elections fully representative, we need to lower the cost of engagement for our youth, and voter pre-registration is one way to do that. Eighteen states, including Florida, Louisiana, and Hawaii, permit preregistration beginning at 16 years old. Alaska should be number 19 so our students can help save the Republic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amy Gallaway', with a stylized, cursive script.

Amy Gallaway

2020 Alaska Teacher of the Year

Civics and History Teacher West Valley High School, Fairbanks, AK