

# Preregistration for Young Voters

To: Alaska House Judiciary Committee

From: Katy Owens Hubler and Katie King, Elections & Redistricting, National Conference of State Legislatures

Date: March 17, 2025

Re: Testimony for Alaska House Bill 21

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for inviting us to submit written testimony on the topic of preregistration for young voters. We are Katy Owens Hubler, associate director, and Katie King, policy associate, in the elections and redistricting program at the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL).

NCSL is the nation's bipartisan organization for legislators and legislative staff. We provide nonpartisan research, testimony and resources to all 50 states, D.C. and the territories. We can provide information in a confidential manner on any election-related topic, or otherwise. NCSL has teams that work with all types of policy.

This written testimony follows with the slides provided. It will cover the following:

- A brief overview of NCSL.
- The timeline of preregistration implementation across states.
- A current overview of preregistration across states.
- An overview of states that have preregistration and automatic voter registration.
- Research on preregistration and voter turnout.
- State approaches to registration in schools.
- Other policies to engage youth.

## HOW NCSL STRENGTHENS LEGISLATURES (Slide 2)

- Conducting policy research.
- Connecting legislators to each other and experts in policy areas.
- Providing training.
- Lobbying on behalf of the states in D.C.
- Hosting meetings and events for legislators and legislative staff.

## WHEN STATES ADOPTED PREREGISTRATION (Slide 4)

Preregistration is largely a 21st century reform with all but three of the states that offer some form preregistration adopting the policy after 2000. Most adopted preregistration during the 2010's though a few states have adopted it within recent years:

- 1970s: 2 states
  - Florida (1972), Hawaii (1977)
- 1990s: 1 state
  - Missouri (1993)
- 2000s: 3 states and D.C.
  - Oregon (2007), California (2009), North Carolina (2009), District of Columbia (2009)
- 2010s: 15 states
  - Maryland (2010), Rhode Island (2010), Delaware (2010), Iowa (2010), Colorado (2013), North Carolina (2013), West Virginia (2013), Massachusetts (2014), Louisiana (2014), Utah (2015), New Jersey (2015), Nevada (2017), Washington (2018), New York (2019), Maine (2019)
- 2020s: 4 states
  - Virginia (2020), Illinois (2023), Michigan (2023), Minnesota (2023)

The other twenty-two states do not specifically address an age for registration and instead allow an individual to register if they will turn 18 by the next election. If you are interested in the legislation used in any or all of these states, we can provide it.

## AGE FOR PREREGISTRATION BY STATE (Slide 5)

Of the 28 states that specify an age other than 18 at which an individual may preregister, they vary from 15 years at the youngest and 17.5 at the oldest, including Alaska:

- 17.5 years old + (2 states)
  - Alaska (90 days before an individual turns 18), Texas (17 years old and ten months)
- 17.5 years old (3 states)
  - Georgia, Missouri, Oklahoma
- 17 years old (4 states)
  - Iowa, Nevada, New Jersey, West Virginia
- 16 years old (18 states plus D.C.)
  - California, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, Virginia and Washington.
- 15 years old
  - Colorado (enacted in 2024)

In the case of Colorado, legislators chose to change the age of preregistration to 15 as it is the age in which teens may get their learner's permit to drive.

## STATES WITH PREREGISTRATION (16 AND 17-YEAR-OLDS) AND AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION (Slide 6)

We were asked to address whether preregistration and automatic (or automated) voter registration connect. Twenty-four states allow automatic voter registration. This includes all but five of the preregistration states identified above.

Note: other states may have automatic voter registration, but no preregistration. Those states are not included in this summary.

- States with preregistration and automatic voter registration (17)
  - California, Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Virginia, Washington

- States with preregistration but no automatic voter registration (5)
  - Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, Utah, West Virginia

## WHAT RESEARCH SAYS ON PREREGISTRATION AND VOTER TURNOUT (Slide 7)

While hard to measure, preregistration does show a modest effect on voter turnout.

- A 2017 study conducted by Anthony Fowler at the University of Chicago suggest that preregistration increased voter turnout for 2% of voters aged 18-22.
- A more recent study conducted in 2020 by Thessalia Merivaki at Mississippi State University suggests that the method for presenting preregistration in schools may have an impact on turnout.

It is worth noting that no single election policy option creates a big boost in voter participation; voter turnout is driven by several other factors, including the candidates themselves, how close the top-of-the-ticket race is, and even the weather.

## EDUCATION AND REGISTRATION IN STATE LAW (Slide 8)

Expanding on the previous section, I'd like to address some ways states have tried to encourage voter registration through in addition to offering preregistration, and especially through high schools. There are several approaches:

- Include voter registration drives in history and civics classes:
  - Rhode Island passed H 1014 requiring U.S. and state history classes to include instruction on election laws and voting. The state also requires local boards to conduct registration drives at high schools (RI ST § 17-9.1-4.1).
  - In 2023, Louisiana passed H 316 which requiring all high schools to participate in a Senior Voter Registration Day on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in May.
  - Combining preregistration with voter education in high school does increase voter participation as opposed to just preregistration alone (McDonald and Thornburg 2010).
- Require schools to have staff members trained on voter registration:
  - Colorado requires each public high school to have one staff member to be trained in voter registration by the county clerk. In addition, each school can compete for a voter registration award through the Secretary of State's office (enacted 2019).
  - Georgia requires all public and private principals to be deputy registrars and are required to inform students and faculty that they can register to vote through these administrators (enacted 2005).
  - Texas requires all public and private high school principals to serve as deputy registrars. They are required to distribute voter registration forms to all eligible students twice a year (enacted 1997).
- Make voter registration forms available at high schools:
  - North Carolina public high schools are required to make voter registration forms available to students who are eligible, and local boards can designate staff to assist students in filling them out (enacted 2018).
  - Virginia requires public high schools to provide mail voter registration applications to all eligible students, and eligible students are provided the opportunity to complete an application during school hours (enacted 2020).

## OTHER OPTIONS TO ENGAGE YOUTH (Slide 9)

We were asked to share information for additional policy options that could boost young voter turnout.

- Permit youth to serve as poll workers.
  - 44 states plus D.C. allow citizens under 18 to serve as poll workers if they meet the required qualifications
  - Research from Tufts University CIRCLE suggests that allowing teens to serve as poll workers may boost voter turnout.

- Permit 17-year-olds to vote in primaries.
  - 21 states plus D.C. allow 17-year-olds who will be 18 by the general election to vote in primaries.
  - This allows pre-registered voters an early opportunity to become a voter.
- Run mock elections as part of a school's curriculum.

This concludes our written testimony. A list of resources is below for your reference, and we are happy to answer any additional questions that you might have. Please send any questions to [katy.owenshubler@ncsl.org](mailto:katy.owenshubler@ncsl.org), or [katie.king@ncsl.org](mailto:katie.king@ncsl.org). We can also be reached by phone at 303.856.1341

## RESOURCES

- [Who Is Left Out? The Process of Validating Voter Registration Applications: Part of Special Symposium on Election Sciences](#) - Thessalia Merivaki, 2020
- [Registering the Youth Through Voter Preregistration](#) - McDonald and Thornburg, 2010
- [CIRCLE Growing Voters](#)
- [Making Young Voters: The Impact of Preregistration on Youth Turnout](#) - Holbein & Hillygus, 2016
- [Does Youth Voter Preregistration Increase Participation](#) – Anthony Fowler, 2017
- [Preregistration for Young Voters](#), NCSL
- [Automatic Voter Registration](#), NCSL
- [Voting Age for Primary Elections](#), NCSL