



April 15, 2021

Letter of Support for House Bill 39

Dear Representative Grier Hopkins,

We write to thank you for introducing House Bill 39 to allow voter pre-registration starting at age 16. We urge our elected leaders in the Alaska State Legislature to support this exciting piece of legislation which would allow for greater participation of young Alaskans in the electoral system.

The Alaska Center Education Fund believes that a healthy democracy is one in which all Alaskans feel agency in their community and have access and means to make their voice heard. HB 39 offers an exciting tool for teachers, parents, mentors, and students to begin an early conversation about civic engagement. Pre-registration for young Alaskans does more than increase the number of young people on the voter rolls; this legislation provides an important entry point for the next generation of Alaskan leaders to affect change in their lives and in their communities.

Since 1998, our Alaska Youth for Environmental Action program has engaged over 5000 youth aged 14-18 from communities across Alaska in leadership and civic action. Each year, we bring 20-25 youth from villages and cities across Alaska to our Civics & Conservation Summit in Juneau to learn from each other and engage with their legislators. Our youth trainers and delegates plan every element of the summit, choosing focus bills, leading trainings on the political process, and preparing for meetings with legislators. Teens have described these experiences as powerful in shaping their views of the political process, and a high percentage continue engaging their communities after graduating the program. The majority of our participants are not yet 18 and are very eager for the time they can register to vote. HB 39 would help these youth prepare for their voyage as American and Alaskan voters.

We know firsthand that young Alaskans are capable of transformative leadership in their communities long before they turn 18. Eve Downing (18), from Soldotna, first started her

involvement with AYEА at age 15. Since then, she has been a trainer at multiple summits, worked a community engagement internship with Cook Inletkeeper, and traveled to D.C. to talk to our state delegation. Lillian Yang (15), from Anchorage, is a member of one of our partner organization Anchorage Youth Vote, she helped plan and host a congressional candidate forum last fall and a school board candidate forum last month. Lillian understands the importance of participating in the electoral process and empowering young people to vote.

We've seen that when young people become involved in our political process, they begin a lifetime of engagement and bring their friends, families, and communities along with them. Young Alaskans are seeing issues in their community and are taking action to address them long before they turn 18. They deserve to participate in and help shape the decisions that affect their future.

We urge the Legislature to pass HB 39 to make our democracy more accessible to all.

Sincerely,

The Alaska Center Education Fund Staff:

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