

ALBANY CALIFORNIA



CITY OF ALBANY
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ALBANY, CA 94706
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Agenda Date: 6 May 2024

MEMORANDUM

To: Albany City Council Members

From: Councilmembers Jordan and Tiedemann

Re: Charter Amendment Allowing Sixteen- and Seventeen-year-olds to Vote in Local Elections

RECOMMENDATION

That the Council direct staff to prepare a ballot measure for the November 2024 general election, amending the City Charter with the attached section, or similar to the effect as recommended by the City Attorney, to allow sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds to vote in City and School Board elections.

BACKGROUND

At its March 26, 2024 meeting, the Albany Unified School District (AUSD) Board of Education (BOE) unanimously passed Resolution 2023-24-15, supporting the extension of voting rights to sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds and requesting that the City Council place a charter amendment to that effect on the November 2024 ballot. The Resolution recommended allowing sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds to vote in School Board and City Council elections as well as for School Board and City ballot measures. The Resolution also stated that AUSD would share the cost of implementing such a measure with the City.

DISCUSSION

Extending voting rights to sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds is backed by the findings of a preponderance of scientific research. A variety of studies have shown that, by the age of sixteen, adolescents are sufficiently cognitively developed in key areas to vote. While emotional and impulsive decision making processes are still developing at this age, rational,

deliberative decision making processes, the kind required to make informed electoral choices, are fully developed.^{1,2,3}

Research finds lowering the voting age will also likely have additional benefits. Civic participation in general, and voting in particular, are habits that positively impact everyone in their practice. Research has shown that voting just once significantly increases one's chances of voting in the future. Because many eighteen-year-olds are going through a period of substantial transition—moving, entering the workforce for the first time, or attending higher education—registering to and casting a vote can be difficult to prioritize. In contrast, when provided the vote prior to this period more people use it, leading them to be more likely to vote again as they get older.⁴

Given the scientific evidence, extending the right to vote to sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds is a matter of equity and increasing civic engagement. While eighteen is the age required by State and Federal law for this and other rights, Albany can take this step with regard to its own elections.

Our neighbors in Oakland and Berkeley have already taken this step for their School Board elections. The attached charter amendment follows the science further by allowing sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds to vote in all local elections, furthering equity in our city.

While Berkeley and Oakland's measures have not been implemented, this is due to delay at the County level. Albany's action would add further impetus to fully realize the policies passed by all three cities. In the meantime, the attached draft charter amendment provides for a supermajority of the Council to delay implementation of lowering the voting age, such as if the Registrar has not yet become capable of including sixteen- and seventeen-year olds in local elections or if the Council judges the cost of doing so too high.

¹ Daniel Hart and Robert Atkins, "American Sixteen- and Seventeen-Year-Olds are Ready to Vote," *The American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* (2011) 633, no. 1, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0002716210382395>

² Joshua A. Douglas, "In Defense of Lowering the Voting Age", *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* (2017), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2903669

³ Markus Wagner, David Johann, and Sylvia Kritzing, "Voting at 16: Turnout and the quality of choice," *Electoral Studies* 31, no. 2, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0261379412000212>

⁴ Alan S. Gerber, Donald P. Green, and Ron Shachar, "Voting May Be Habit Forming: Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment," *American Journal of Political Science* (2003) <https://isps.yale.edu/research/publications/isps03-004>

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

The recommended action does not have sustainability implications.

SOCIAL EQUITY AND INCLUSIVITY CONSIDERATIONS

The recommended action advances the City's goals of social equity and inclusivity by engaging a greater share of our populace in the democratic process. Extending voting rights to sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds is a tangible way to value our youth as well as ensure that as many of the people affected by the decisions of our government have a voice in that government.

CITY COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVES

The recommended action directly relates to Goal #4: Encourage Community Connectivity Through Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. As discussed in the previous sections, expanding the franchise in local elections includes a greater share of our residents in our democratic process.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The cost of extending the franchise to sixteen- and seventeen-year olds, in the form of additional charges by the Registrar, are unknown. For this reason, the recommended amendment provides the Council, on vote by a supermajority, to delay implementation each election, such as if it judges the cost is too high.

ATTACHMENT

1. Charter Amendment Section