Lower the Voting Age in Municipal Elections
Lower the Voting Age in Municipal Elections

Across the country, young people are taking on more responsibilities and collaborating with city leaders to improve their communities. Many young people are engaging in civic leadership in their communities, working jobs, as well as going to school. However, many are not able to vote, and overall voter turnout is decreasing.

Why is lowering the voting age a good idea?

- **A lower voting age increases voter turnout**
  - A Danish study found that the likelihood of young people voting in their first election decreases by one percentage point for every month they age.

- **Youth manage other adult responsibilities successfully.**
  - Young people can have jobs, pay taxes, drive, join the armed forces (at 17 with parental consent), be primary caregivers for other family members and participate in politics through political campaigns and activism.

- **Youth do not automatically vote with their parents or celebrities.**
  - In the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum, 40 percent of the 16- and 17-year-olds voted differently than their parents.

- **Many cities across the country are beginning to make the change.**
  - Three cities in Maryland allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in local elections. Takoma Park, Maryland was the first city to lower the voting age.
  - Washington D.C. and other large cities continue to make progress toward a lower voting age.
  - Berkeley, California passed an ordinance to lower the voting age for school board elections to 16.
  - San Francisco’s ballot proposition to lower the voting age received 48 percent of the vote and will return to the ballot in 2020.
Sample Charter Amendment authorizing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote

The charter amendment passed by the Hyattsville City Council in Maryland which lowered their voting age to 16 as well as implementing a few other voting reforms is available at www.hyattsville.org/DocumentCenter/View/4031/Charter-Amendment-Resolution-2016-02_Qualifications-of-Voters-and-Same-Day-Registration_SIGNED?bidId=

Initial Analysis of How to Lower Municipal Voting Age in Your State

The first step towards determining the feasibility of lowering the voting age in your city is looking at both the state Constitution and state election statutes to see if they have provisions regarding the voting age. It is important to also look at case law to determine exactly how these provisions are being interpreted.

If the voting age is phrased as a restriction in the state Constitution, e.g. “no person younger than 18 may vote,” then a state constitutional amendment would be required. If the voting age is phrased as a restriction in a state statute, then the state legislature must pass a new law to change the statute.

If voting age is phrased as an entitlement in both the state Constitution and state statutes, e.g. “All citizens over the age of 18 are entitled to vote,” then it becomes a case of home rule. Home rule varies by state, some states list which subjects municipal governments have control over. Other states simply have vague descriptions that are left up to interpretation or require approval by the state legislature.

A state-by-state guide on the feasibility of lowering the voting age in each state is available at https://fairvote.app.box.com/v/voting-age-feasibility-study.