



Committee on Judiciary
Chair Karl Rhoads, Vice Chair Jarrett Keohokalele

Thursday, February 3, 2022 9:30 a.m. Via Videoconference

SB 2178 PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO ARTICLE II, SECTION 1, OF THE HAWAII STATE CONSTITUTION TO CHANGE THE AGE QUALIFICATION FOR VOTING IN STATE OR LOCAL ELECTIONS.

TESTIMONY

Janet Mason, Legislative Committee, League of Women Voters of Hawaii

Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalele, and Committee Members:

The League of Women Voters of Hawaii supports SB2178 that proposes a constitutional amendment to allow individuals who are seventeen years of age but will be eighteen years of age on or before the next state or local general election to vote at the state or local primary election immediately preceding the state or local general election by which the citizen will attain the age of eighteen, and at any co-occurring or intervening special election.

To us, this bill is compelling, because a major improvement in historically low youth turnout seems to be underway among young voters of both major political parties. In the 2020 presidential election 52-55% of eligible people ages 18-29 voted.¹ League hopes this high turnout could be sustained to keep younger citizens engaged in the voting process.

Allowing voting in the primary could be considered the first step of a general election when the voter is eighteen and is otherwise eligible. In fact, a third of states allow those who are 17 but will be eighteen by the general election to vote in primaries.²

It is true that young people move often but allowing voter registration and voting simultaneously as called for in these measures should go a long way toward keeping address records accurate for the first voting experience. In preparation for mailing ballots County Clerks could still send Hawaii's yellow "registration notification postcard" to these seventeen-year-olds when they send it to other voters. But part of the first registration experience for the new voter would be Learning about the importance of keeping, one's voter registration and address information current going forward.

¹ <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/election-week-2020#youth-voter-turnout-increased-in-2020>

² <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/primaries-voting-age.aspx>



This bill implies that 17-year-old individuals who meet criteria for voting under this new law would similarly be permitted to register to vote before their first election. Is it necessary to clarify this in the language of this bill?

The League has previously supported preregistration for 16- and 17-year-olds. As with preregistration only, this bill would require County Clerks to flag their voter registration record to indicate the seventeen-year-olds described in this measure would not yet be eligible to vote in Federal elections. This would require certain investment, but the population of “late seventeen” eligible people in Hawaii would be small. Likewise, a modified ballot that does not include Federal races would need to be available for seventeen-year-old voters. Lessons can be learned from other states.

When registering to vote, more 17-year-olds than older voters do not have a driver’s license or state identification card. However, other forms of identification are acceptable under our state’s voter registration laws.

We presume this bill does not go further to simply lower the voting age to 17 because the 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution speaks to voting rights only for those who are 18 years of age or older. Nevertheless, the bill would be a step forward so that those who are nearly 18 could be better prepared to vote in **all** elections, not just state and local. Voting is a habit that is acquired early in life.

If the legislature passes this measure and voters approve this proposed Constitutional amendment in our 2022 elections, the new Act could take effect by 2024. It would be great to publicize this new opportunity for Hawaii’s young people.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Statement Before The
SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY
Thursday, February 3, 2022
9:30 AM
Via Video Conference

in consideration of
SB 2178

PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO ARTICLE II, SECTION 1, OF THE HAWAII STATE CONSTITUTION TO CHANGE THE AGE QUALIFICATION FOR VOTING IN STATE OR LOCAL ELECTIONS.

Chairs RHOADS, Vice Chair KEOHOKALOLE, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

Common Cause Hawaii supports SB 2178, which proposes a constitutional amendment to allow individuals who are seventeen years of age but will be eighteen years of age on or before the next state or local general election to vote at the state or local primary election immediately preceding the state or local general election by which the citizen will attain the age of eighteen, and at any co-occurring or intervening special election.

Common Cause Hawaii is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to reforming government and strengthening democracy through voting modernization efforts that increase civic engagement, voter turnout, and voter participation in our democratic processes.

Studies have shown that voting is a habit, which develop over repetition and can become strongly ingrained if developed early. See <https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/456934-how-voting-becomes-a-habit> (retrieved Jan. 29, 2022). SB 2178 will allow people to vote starting at age seventeen. SB 2178 is an important bill to allow young people to vote and continue to vote their entire lives, leading to a strong and vibrant democracy. “We do not have government by the majority. We have government by the majority who participate.” Thomas Jefferson.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 2178. If you have further questions of me, please contact me at sma@commoncause.org.

Very respectfully yours,

Sandy Ma
Executive Director, Common Cause Hawaii

SB2178

The Green Party of Hawai'i would like to add our support to SB2178 to lower the voting age to 17 years of age. We need citizens to become more activated and participate in government if we are to have an engaged electorate. The younger people start paying attention the more functional a democracy becomes.

We encourage our state legislature to pass SB 2178 through this committee.

Mahalo,

Green Party of Hawai'i

Co-Chair GPH Susan Roberts Emery

SB-2178

Submitted on: 1/28/2022 6:24:15 PM

Testimony for JDC on 2/3/2022 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Remote Testimony Requested
Ann S Freed	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members,

Strong support. If you can be in the military at age 18 you ought to be able to vote!

Ann S. Freed

Life-time Feminist,

Mililani



Testimony with SUPPORTIVE COMMENTS on
SB2178 Relating to Lowering the Voting Age

Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice-chair Keohokalole, and members of the JDC Committee,

Vote16HI would like to provide supportive comments on SB2178, which would lower the voting age to 17 for primary elections and any intervening or co-occurring special election immediately preceding the general election, so long as that individual turns 18 years old on or before the next general election. Vote16HI is a coalition of youth, adult allies, and organizations that support lowering the voting age to 16 in Hawai'i.

One of the primary goals of lowering the voting age is to give high schoolers the opportunity to vote at least once before they graduate. There are studies which show that people develop habits at a young age, closer to the age of 16 rather than 18. In addition, it is common knowledge that voting is habitual. In Hawai'i, because our elections occur every two years, in order to achieve this goal, mathematically speaking, the voting age needs to be lowered to 16. Since the population of Hawai'i residents who will turn 18 between the primary and general election is a miniscule fraction of the population, most students will still never have the opportunity to vote while in high school.

However, we still greatly appreciate the intent behind SB2178 in expanding the right to vote, and believe that it is a step in the right direction. In addition, we hope that the right to vote will be extended to 16-year-olds as many other nations and municipalities have done so already. By lowering the voting age to 16 rather than 17, every high schooler in Hawai'i will have the opportunity, should they choose it, to vote at least once and build that positive habit of voting before they leave for the chaos of college.

Thank you for your consideration and mahalo for the opportunity to testify,
The Vote16HI Hui

SB-2178

Submitted on: 1/29/2022 11:20:25 AM

Testimony for JDC on 2/3/2022 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Remote Testimony Requested
Marilyn Yamamoto	Individual	Comments	No

Comments:

Senator Rhoads,

My perspective is that the Hawaii State Legislature has more urgent issues to debate and resolve than to address the voting rights of 17-year olds. The KEIKI Caucus raised the voting age issue last year. What is the benefit of this legislation?

SB-2178

Submitted on: 1/30/2022 10:10:37 AM

Testimony for JDC on 2/3/2022 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Remote Testimony Requested
Shannon Rudolph	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Support

SB-2178

Submitted on: 1/31/2022 8:44:11 AM

Testimony for JDC on 2/3/2022 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Remote Testimony Requested
Lisa Huynh Eller	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

SB 2178 will allow people to vote starting at age seventeen.

SB 2178 is an important bill to allow young people to vote and continue to vote their entire lives, leading to a strong and vibrant democracy.

SB-2178

Submitted on: 1/31/2022 3:21:29 PM

Testimony for JDC on 2/3/2022 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Remote Testimony Requested
Susan Dursin	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Please support SB2178, which would allow 17-year-olds to vote.

According to government statistics, in 2017 15.5% of the labor force consisted of 16 and 17-year-olds. They must pay taxes. Taxation without representation goes against the grain of this country. Minors can be charged criminally like adults.

A study in the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science found that "on measures of civic knowledge, political skills, political efficacy and tolerance, 16 and 17-year olds score as high as adults."

Many of the arguments against allowing 17-year-olds to vote are based in the sad voting data of the American public at large. "Youths can be unduly influenced by social media.," they say. Well, obviously vast numbers of older voters fall prey to social media misinformation. "Young people will simply vote the way their parents do" is a second argument. Before women got the vote in 1920, the anti-feminists claimed that wives would vote the way their husbands did. Not so.

We need to open the avenues of public education and engagement, not deny the vote to those who will benefit from doing so. Please support SB2178.

SB-2178

Submitted on: 2/1/2022 7:08:17 AM

Testimony for JDC on 2/3/2022 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Remote Testimony Requested
David Anderson	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Studies have shown that voting is a habit, which develop over repetition and can become strongly ingrained if developed early.

SB 2178 will allow people to vote starting at age seventeen.

SB 2178 is an important bill to allow young people to vote and continue to vote their entire lives, leading to a strong and vibrant democracy.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this bill.

SB-2178

Submitted on: 1/31/2022 5:00:23 PM

Testimony for JDC on 2/3/2022 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Remote Testimony Requested
Cynthia Reves	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

I am a high school teacher and support this legislation.