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Bill Introduced to Extend Voting Rights to 16- and 17-year-olds in DC Elections

Backed by Vote16DC Coalition, CM Charles Allen Proposes Lower Voting Age for DC

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, DC Councilmember Charles Allen (Ward 6) introduced the Youth Vote Amendment Act of 2018 to change the voting age to 16 in the District of Columbia with the goal of increasing civic engagement and participation, establishing voting as a lifelong habit, and empowering youth.

The bill is supported by the Vote16DC coalition, a group of youth, adult allies, and organizations led by Generation Citizen and the Young Women's Project, who believe that DC should extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds in the District. A diverse group of young people from across DC are taking action to mobilize their peers and educate city leaders and DC residents about the benefits of lowering the voting age to 16.

"Our voice, and our vote, should be heard when everything that's being voted on affects us," says Tre'Von Davis, 17, a Junior Mentor at Life Pieces To Masterpieces and Ward 4 Resident. "We work, support our communities, and pay taxes, and deserve to have a say on our future and have an influence on politics."

Sixteen-year-old voting is not without precedent. Three Maryland cities – Takoma Park, Hyattsville, and Greenbelt – allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in local elections, and several other cities around the country are debating the issue. DC is in a position, though, to become the first major US city to make this change to strengthen its democracy.

Research shows that voting is habitual, and 16 is a better time than 18 to establish the habit. Turnout data reflects this; in cities that permit 16- and 17-year-olds to vote, they are participating at higher rates than older age groups.

"Only one in five voters ages 18-24 actually votes," says Alik Schier, 16, a Peer Educator at Young Women's Project and Ward 1 resident. "By lowering the voting age to 16, DC can not only teach students about the concept of civic engagement, but also provide the actual experience of getting registered and a habit of voting early in life."

"Young people's lives are profoundly impacted by the decisions and agenda of DC leaders," says Nadia Gold-Moritz, Executive Director, Young Women's Project. "As someone who works with youth every day, I believe they deserve the opportunity to weigh in and to be taken seriously as voting constituents."

The bill was co-introduced by Councilmembers Brianne K. Nadeau (D-Ward 1), David Grosso (I-At Large), Robert C. White Jr. (D-At Large), Trayon White Sr. (D-Ward 8), and Anita Bonds (D-At Large).

Vote16DC is a coalition of DC youth, adult allies, and organizations including Amara Legal Center, Break the Cycle, Critical Exposure, DC Action for Children, DC Alliance of Youth Advocates, DC Fiscal Policy Institute, For the Love of Children, Latin American Youth Center, Life Pieces to Masterpieces, Mikva Challenge DC, Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless, Whitman Walker Health, and Young Women's Project. It is part of Vote16USA, a national initiative of Generation Citizen that supports local efforts to extend voting rights to 16-year-olds.

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