

Dear members of the Special Committee on Democratic and Electoral Reform,

We are a group of high-school youth that are part of Foundry's Agenda Gap program. Our mission is to empower youth in Abbotsford and across B.C. by advocating for stronger political representation and policies that support youth mental health and well-being. We believe youth should have a direct voice in shaping the decisions that impact their communities and personal lives. Through activism and education, we work toward a future where youth leadership and advocacy drive a more just, equitable, and inclusive society.

We are writing to you today because in 2019 the NDP passed a policy convention resolution to extend the right to vote to 16 and 17 year olds. That year, the BC Green Party and Union of Municipalities unanimously supported a call to lower the provincial voting age as well. Yet, despite the current political climate and its threats to democracy, and the fact that Young New Democrats have party leadership voting rights, 16 and 17 year old youth remain disenfranchised from voting. This exclusion has far reaching impacts on youth wellbeing. This is a longstanding request and its time is overdue. It is aligned with NDP values of supporting youth engagement and addressing the needs of diverse Canadians.

Youth represent one fifth of Canada's population, with 674,500 youth under the age of 18 in British Columbia alone. Increasingly, youth are leading social movements and getting involved in their communities. Further, youth aged 16 to 17 can decide to work an unrestricted amount of hours, pay taxes, join the armed forces, become emancipated, get married, consent to sex, leave school, and drive. Young people contribute greatly to their communities and Canadian society as a whole. For example, our economic contributions as a large part of the labour force are deeply impactful upon sustaining our collective future. Further, we know that youth who vote are both passionate and knowledgeable about current affairs. In alignment with Canada's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, young people deserve the right that voting affords to participate in political life and influence the decisions and policies that affect them.

As documented in the recent [Lowering the Voting Age: UNICEF Canada Policy Brief](#) (2024), a number of countries around the world, such as Austria, Belgium and Scotland, have empowered youth aged 16-18 with the right to vote. Research reveals there are no downsides to youth participation. In fact, such changes increase and broaden civic and political engagement by also increasing parent voting engagement. Extending voting rights to youth after they turn 16 also resulted in participation over a longer term, strengthening their democratic processes.

Canadians are confronting a multitude of challenges affecting our wellbeing, such as financial and social inequality, climate change, and threats to democracy. Considering these challenges alongside the decline in voter engagement, this request is timely as youth will bring a fresh perspective, new solutions, diverse opinions, and increased political representation. Extending the voting age to 16 will ultimately strengthen youth wellbeing, participation, representation, and democracy itself.

We are counting on you to:

- Extend the right to vote to those aged 16 and 17 years;
- Increase access to accurate, non-partisan political information for youth and Canadians broadly, including enhanced curriculum in schools;
- Call upon the Federal government to extend the right to vote to 16 & 17 year olds.

Thank you, in advance, for your action on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Abbotsford Agenda Gap Youth
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