



April 18, 2025

Toronto City Hall  
100 Queen Street West  
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

**Re: Agenda Item EX22.5 - Amendments to Municipal Code Chapter 190, Polling and Notification including Lowering the Polling Age**

Vote16 Canada strongly supports the report from the City Clerk entitled “Amendments to Municipal Code Chapter 190, Polling and Notification including Lowering the Polling Age.”<sup>1</sup>

The City Clerk’s office has ensured not only that their recommendations would let 16- and 17-year-olds participate in neighbourhood polls successfully, but that they would produce a more streamlined and effective polling process for everyone. Clarity and fairness in poll administration are crucial, and this report incorporates those values. The proposed replacement of in-person affidavits with online-submitted proof of eligibility streamlines how voters—especially younger ones—are added to the poll list.

This policy removes an arbitrary barrier to participation for residents who are directly affected by local issues and may already be civically engaged through school, volunteer work, or employment.

According to research from Elections Canada, 16-17s are just as interested, if not more, in participating in various forms of political activity, including both voting and non-electoral civic activities.<sup>4</sup> Canadian scholars have found that 16-17s are not less politically developed than adults, and, depending on the aspect being looked at, they are more knowledgeable or as knowledgeable as adults.<sup>5</sup> Compared to 18-20s, they know as much about political institutions, the campaign promises, and the candidates.

The cognitive ability to make informed decisions around voting—termed “cold cognition”—reaches maturity by 16.<sup>6</sup> A recent review of the developmental science literature found that, “[t]aken together, adolescents, on average, are capable of rational, deliberative decision making supported by their mature cognitive capacities”.<sup>7</sup> Further research from Austria, Belgium, and Germany, three countries that have extended the voting age, shows that 16- and 17-year-olds also match adults in the quality of their vote choice—that they make their voting decisions as effectively and as competently as adults.<sup>8,9,10</sup> As curious and innovative individuals, their perspectives are essential.

As the Chief Electoral Officer of the Northwest Territories has recently concluded, “In the jurisdictions where they have lowered the voting age, what they've found is that 16- and 17-year-olds vote at a higher rate than 18- to 24-year-olds... but they're also more likely to vote in the next election, and the one after that.”<sup>11</sup> Younger voters may also create a “trickle up” effect, motivating the adults in their lives to vote at higher rates.<sup>12</sup>

As of today, 17 countries have a minimum voting age of 16 for at least one level of government, including Germany, Scotland, Wales, Austria, Belgium, Finland, and several cities in the US.<sup>13</sup> Each year, we uncover more evidence that there is a positive, lasting effect on turnout from extending the voting age to 16. 16- and 17-year-olds have an interest in the safety, accessibility, and vibrancy of their communities. By enacting this change, we can ensure more voters will cast their first ballot as youth and develop a lifelong habit of participation.

We therefore urge Toronto City Council to adopt EX22.5.

Sincerely,

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## References

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