



Legislative Testimony  
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**Written Testimony Supporting Senate Joint Resolution 35, A Resolution Proposing a State Constitutional Amendment to Allow Individuals Who Have Attained the Age of Sixteen to Apply for Admission as Electors and Be So Admitted Upon Attaining the Age of Eighteen**

Senator Flexer, Representative Blumenthal, Ranking Members Sampson and Mastrofrancesco, and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am writing to testify in support of Senate Joint Resolution 35, A Resolution Proposing a State Constitutional Amendment to Allow Individuals Who Have Attained the Age of Sixteen to Apply for Admission as Electors and Be So Admitted Upon Attaining the Age of Eighteen.

Voting is a foundation of democracy, a right through which we can protect and preserve our other rights. For that reason, the ACLU-CT supports extending voting rights to the greatest number of people, with the only permissible restrictions being those essential to making elections secure and fair. This must include a targeted effort to increase voter turnout among groups with traditionally low participation, like young people.<sup>1</sup> One way to encourage higher youth vote turnout is through pre-registration, where young adults complete voter registration ahead of their eighteenth birthday. Once they turn eighteen, their registrations automatically move from pending to active. This is a common-sense resolution is an important first step in engaging young voters.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Mijin Cha & Liz Kennedy, *Millions to the Polls: Practical Policies to Fulfill the Freedom to Vote for All Americans*, DEMOS (2014), <https://www.demos.org/policy-briefs/millions-polls>.

Currently, fifteen states, including Massachusetts, and Washington, D.C. allow sixteen year olds to pre-register to vote, and several other states allow seventeen year olds to pre-register.<sup>2</sup> We know that engaging future voters at a young age increases voter registration in the short and long-term. For example, in 2008, pre-registered young voters in Florida voted at a rate 4.7 percent higher than young voters who registered after turning eighteen.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, pre-registration would not require the construction of additional voter databases—instead, pre-registrants are simply marked as pending which can then automatically move to active status.<sup>4</sup> Pre-registration should be coupled with outreach programs to young voters, like voter registration drives in public and private high schools, creating opportunities for youth to volunteer in the democratic processs, and outreach to children incarcerated in juvenile detention facilities. Senate Joint Resolution 35 would be a powerful and proven effective way to increase voter turnout amongst our youngest voters. As such, the ACLU-CT supports this resolution, and urges this Committee to do the same.

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<sup>2</sup> *Preregistration for Young Voters*, NCSL (Jan. 20, 2023), <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/preregistration-for-young-voters>.

<sup>3</sup> Cha, *supra* note 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*