

Natalya Cabral

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Written Testimony For H. 5382

R.I. General Assembly House Committee on State Government & Elections

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee

Thank you for allowing me to testify on this important issue **for House Bill 5382**. My name is Natalya Cabral, and I am a Co-Chair of the Youth Engagement Committee at Brown Votes, the nonpartisan University-sponsored voting and democratic participation initiative of Brown University, where I am a second-year concentrating in Education and International & Public Affairs. The Youth Engagement Committee at Brown Votes focuses on increasing youth civic education and participation.

I come to you today in my position at Brown Votes, having been born and raised in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, and attending Pawtucket Public Schools and now Brown University. Having been a student in Rhode Island's public schools, I know firsthand the importance of civic engagement at a young age. I would not be where I am today without it. Brown refers to their students as "architects of our own education." It is my hope that Rhode Island high school students have that same opportunity, that chance to take charge in their learning, through an ability to help elect officials who will best serve them and the greater Rhode Island community.

By setting the age requirement to vote in school board elections at sixteen years of age as opposed to eighteen currently, we allow those actively in the schools to have direct say in the people who represent them and facilitate their education. This should increase voter turnout, as well: this new pool of voters would be inherently more motivated to help select their representation than those less directly impacted by the operations of a school, such as the elderly, those without children, or even 18-year-olds who've graduated. With the ability to help influence school decisions, your student citizens will hopefully have more interest in their academics, becoming more excited to go to school and more ready for their pursuits after high school.

From a school board perspective, I believe the inclusion of opinions from active students would be a benefit to the officials of the school committee, and thus the state itself. Students are your strongest first hand account of districts' needs, and would provide powerful indications for what decisions will have the most impact. Therefore, this bill would not only be a positive for the new voters, but for the education system as a whole.

Thank you.

Natalya Cabral