



May 4, 2023

The Honorable Grace Meng
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Meng:

On behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children, I am writing in support of your bill, H.J.Res. 16, which proposes an amendment to the Constitution to lower the voting age to 16.

Children in our country are dependent upon our democracy to help address their needs, concerns, and best interests, but their inability to participate in the political process causes them to be treated as an afterthought by lawmakers. Since children cannot vote, do not have Political Action Committees (PACs), and don't have lobbyists, their needs and concerns are often ignored by policymakers at all levels of government. Even when the issue is specifically a children's issue, the issues of importance to children are often lost due to the prominence given to adults in the political debate.

Fortunately, there has been a large rise in youth activism in recent years, from leading marches, organizing walkouts, speaking up at school board meetings, and more. These efforts should be applauded and have in fact led to change in policy both locally and on a national level. However, the demonstrations do not result in change unless those in power have the impetus to listen and take action.

Without the right to vote, time and time again, the voices of young people go unheard and unheeded, despite the fact that pretty much every issue is a children's issue. Moreover, on aspects of policy relating to education, school shootings, internet privacy, climate change, health care, mental health, and child abuse and neglect at home and abroad, children can be the actual experts.

For example, young people have attempted to speak out for years about issues such as sex abuse within churches, the Boy Scouts, the U.S. Women's Gymnastics program, the Kids for Cash scandal, etc. to no avail. People, including lawmakers, should have listened.

As Olympic gold medalist Aly Raisman has said:

Abuse goes way beyond the moment, often haunting survivors for the rest of their lives, making it difficult to trust and impacting their relationships. . . If over these many years, just one adult listened and had the courage and character to act, this tragedy could have been avoided.

The consequence of ignoring, silencing, or dismissing children and their experiences has the effect of protecting those that perpetuate harm and injustice upon children.

Consequently, as a nation, we rank among the bottom in terms of wealthy nations making investments in our children and their future. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that we also rank rather poorly when it comes to outcome measures related to child well-being. Kids need greater agency in addressing their problems, needs, and concerns or we will all suffer the consequences for years to come.

Opponents will argue that adults, such as parents and grandparents will adequately address the needs of children. In many cases, that is clearly a false assertion. For example, on issues of importance to the lives of children, adults sometimes have conflicting interests. Even in cases where adults demonstrate tacit support for children's issues, they are often not a priority.

For example, grandparents care deeply about their grandchildren. However, in a May 2014 poll by American Viewpoint, 27% of grandparents citizens cited "senior issues" as the most important concern for their vote for Congress compared to just 0.4% for "children's issues." Therefore, grandparents rank their own policy concerns over those of children by a wide 70-to-1 margin.

Since adults can vote, provide campaign contributions, and have powerful advocacy groups promoting their needs and interests, it should be no surprise that kids are treatment as an afterthought whose needs are dismissed, neglected, and diminished.

Expanding the vote to age 16 ensures that our nation's youth are welcome participants in our political process and that their voices and knowledge on key issues are actually heard. Lawmakers who must respond to and be accountable to young people are more likely to act with positive attention to critically important children's policy matters.

For reasons of importance to the well-being of our democracy and our nation's children, we strongly support H.J.Res. 16 and thank you for your leadership on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce Lesley". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bruce Lesley
President