



## BC Local Governments Support Lowering Voting Age to 16

A strong majority of local elected officials at UBCM passed resolution asking Province to lower voting age in B.C.

Date: Friday, September 27, 2019

For Immediate Release

VICTORIA, BC — A majority of B.C. elected, local government officials have voted in favour of lowering the voting age to 16 for local elections.

At the Union of BC Municipalities meeting on Thursday, the City of Victoria brought forward a resolution to lower the voting age to 16. The resolution was supported by a strong majority of delegates from across the province. In response to the outcry for climate action and the efficacy of youth fighting for a sustainable future, elected adults decided it's time to bring the youth voice more formally into local politics by giving them the right to vote in local elections.

Nahira Gerster-Sim, a 15-year-old organizer and advocate for lowering the voting age with the provincial Campaign #Vote16BC, attended UBCM as a student. She says, "At age 16, youth have jobs, drive cars, and they can even get married or join the military with parental consent. If we're old enough to die for our country, we're old enough to vote in it."

Despite the low voter turnout amongst adults and youth in local elections, a 2015 report on political participation and civic engagement of youth showed that younger people were actually more likely than older people to participate in *non-electoral civic* and political activities, such as signing petitions, participating in demonstrations or attending public meetings.<sup>1</sup> This indicates that low voter participation from youth is not due to apathy but rather from to lack of engagement in the electoral process.

Fallon O'Neill, another #Vote16BC campaigner and a 16-year-old from Rockridge Secondary School, watched the resolution pass at UBCM. "This is a really exciting day for youth and for democracy," she said. "But this is bigger than voter engagement. Youth have a stake in the future and will inherit the successes and failures of the previous generation. This is about having a say in the decisions that impact us. This is about youth rights," O'Neill adds.

"We can see that our youth are clearly engaged in political issues," said Mayor Helps. "The climate strikes are just one example. But the youth are doing more than striking. When they put down their picket signs and have conversations with us, they are demanding fiscal responsibility, sustainable jobs, and a longterm approach to governance. That's exactly the kind of thinking we look for from our constituents, at any age."

Despite the passing of the resolution at UBCM, local governments don't have the power to lower the voting age. Only the provincial government can change electoral laws within B.C. Regardless, the support of local governments is an important first step to lowering the voting age in B.C. The next step is to work with the Province to turn the resolution into legislation.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2015001/article/14232-eng.htm>

**For More Information:**

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