

July 29, 2018

The City of Calgary
Office of the Councillors (8001)
P.O. Box 2100, Station M
Calgary, AB, Canada T2P 2M5



RE: Support for NOM Lowering the Voting Age

Dear Mr. Chahal and Members of City Council,

We live in strange times. Increasingly our public discourse is being framed by misinformation, sensationalism, and even direct manipulation of the democratic processes we value so much. **Our electoral processes are one of the last strongholds of healthy communities – and they must be both protected and improved.** Lowering the voting age is not a panacea for electoral reform – however, it is an important piece (along with campaign finance rule changes), that will ultimately improve the state of politics and governance in Calgary.

I write this letter situated in my own past experiences in youth governance and the incredible insights I've gained from my time teaching social studies at the K-12 level. I have met and taught many thoughtful, reasonable, and brilliant 16 and 17-year olds. Alberta has one of the best education systems in the world, and while we must always be committed to improving, this should not be easily dismissed. Now charged with training the next-generation of educators at the University of Calgary, I am reminded every day of the importance of civic-mindedness and engagement. I have run youth consultations alongside the United Nations Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial, served as a Young Diplomats of Canada Ambassador at the 2017 World Bank/IMF Annual Meetings, and am a proud member of the World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Shapers network (an initiative comprised of young people across the world generating positive change in their cities – bound by the common goal of building a more prosperous, peaceful, and inclusive world). **I can confirm to you that jurisdictions around the world are actively considering making the same change you are considering today.**

If the NOM is passed and the province were to take up the recommendations of Council, I am convinced of the following:

- ***Civic-mindedness will increase.*** There will be greater opportunity for students partaking in social studies and civics classes to gain a better understanding of both our governance processes and the importance of the vote. Arguments that frame the civic understanding of a 17 vs. 18-year-old as different, are not rooted in evidence.
- ***We can create lifelong voters.*** Research has shown the earlier someone votes, the greater likelihood they will continue to vote throughout their life. If given the right to vote while the young adult is still in their childhood home/enrolled in secondary school, these individuals will be better supported to participate than when they turn 18.
- ***Opposition arguments are sometimes framed for partisan reasons.*** Whether the political profile of a 16 or 17-year-old is believed to trend progressive or conservative, neither are reasons that should be considered in this decision.

- **Opposition arguments are not often rooted in evidence.** Think pieces in newspapers and theoretical musings are not evidentiary support. Many countries/municipalities have afforded the vote to 16-year-olds with only one consequence: they vote. Argentina, Austria, Brazil, German cities, etc. have reported higher turnout from 16-year-olds than 18 to 21-year-olds. What substantiated negatives have arisen due to this policy change?
- **16 and 17-year-olds match the profile of a voting bloc.** Young adults in Calgary can seek employment without parental permission, pay taxes on that income, provide consent for sex, drive a vehicle, use city services, enlist in our armed services, can vote for political party leaders, and yet do not have the right to vote in city elections (their first order of governance). They deserve representation.

Finally, it should be stated that **my support for this NOM is unrelated to our upcoming plebiscite** and instead indicative of my commitment to supporting youth participation in matters of city, provincial, and federal governance (as evidenced by the work listed above). Should the NOM fail, I will continue to advocate for the reform in the years to come.

Please also consider the following statements of support:

In the last year, Global Shapers have engaged the youth of Calgary through projects relating to refugee settlement, gender diversity, climate change, indigenous issues and disruptive technologies. Throughout the course of our interactions we found that the intellect, passion, dedication, and empathy displayed by the younger citizens of Calgary has been undeniable. As a Global Shaper, I believe the voting age should be reduced to 16 to engage young Calgarians in the democratic process at an earlier age and increase representation from a demographic that often pays taxes and exists as a strong contributor to our society and economy.

Umair Pervez, Outgoing Curator – WEF Global Shapers (Calgary Hub)

In our endeavours to date, young people have been central to grassroots activism, policy-making and lasting social change. Consequently, we believe that lowering the age of voting to 16 could empower youth to be informed, engaged and active in political discourses. It is for this reason that we strongly endorse this proposal.

Theresa Tang, Curator – WEF Global Shapers (Calgary Hub)

The kids are alright.

Sincerely,

Jason Ribeiro
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