

1 [Urging to Lower San Francisco's Legal Voting Age to 16 years of age]

2 **Resolution urging the Mayor and Board of Supervisors to lower San Francisco's legal**
3 **voting age to sixteen in municipal and school district elections**

4 WHEREAS, Upon turning 16, young people can drive, work without limitations on
5 hours, pay taxes, take classes on government in school, are subject to adult criminal charges,
6 and yet are denied the right to vote; and

7 WHEREAS, Young people often feel excluded from being engaged in their government
8 and are underrepresented in local government; and

9 WHEREAS, On September 15, 2014, the United Nations declared 2014's International
10 Day of Democracy theme to be "Engaging Young People on Democracy," calling for countries
11 around the world to increase their efforts to engage young people in their democratic
12 processes¹; and

13 WHEREAS, Extending voting rights to youth of 16 years of age would empower young
14 people to become engaged in our local government; and

15 WHEREAS, With the right to vote, young people would increase their knowledge and
16 interest in politics, and the issues directly affecting them; and

17 WHEREAS, 16 year olds possess roughly the same political knowledge as 21 year
18 olds and come close to the average for all adults²; and

19 WHEREAS, Young people will make voting habitual, as voting is a life-long habit
20 acquired once one casts their first vote³; and

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22 ¹ The United Nations, "2014 Theme: Engaging Young People on Democracy," September 15, 2014. Accessed
23 December 6, 2014. <http://www.un.org/en/events/democracyday/>

24 ² Hart, Daniel and Atkins, Robert, "American Sixteen- and Seventeen-Year-Olds Are Ready to Vote." *The Annals*
25 *of the American Academy of Social Science*. Accessed December 1, 2014.
<http://ann.sagepub.com/content/633/1/201>

³ Elias Dinas. "The Formation of Voting Habits." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*. Accessed
December 6, 2014.
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17457289.2012.718280?tab=permissions#tabModule>

1 WHEREAS, They will be more likely to continue civic engagement throughout their
2 lives than are those who begin voting later⁴; and

3 WHEREAS, Having young people voting at earlier ages would increase voter turnout in
4 future elections and further stimulate interest in getting more involved in local government
5 advocacy work; and

6 WHEREAS, Studies have proven 16 year old voters are competent and mature enough
7 to make well-informed decisions that will influence their life and the broader electorate⁵; and

8 WHEREAS, Given the current age demographics in San Francisco, where the average
9 age of the electorate has risen from 44.2 in 1980 to 45.8 and is projected to 47. 6 by 2025,
10 expanding the electorate is essential to counterbalance this aging; and

11 WHEREAS, An aging electorate may neglect the interests of more diverse younger
12 generations; and

13 young people have interests and priorities that differ from those of older voters; and

14 WHEREAS, Numerous countries—Austria, Argentina, Brazil, Germany, Norway and
15 the United Kingdom—have extended the right to vote to 16 year olds in national, state, and
16 local elections or are considering to do so, and studies have revealed higher turnouts among
17 ages 16-17 than among 18 year old voters; and

18 WHEREAS, In December 2010, Lowell of Massachusetts's City Council passed a
19 resolution petitioning the Massachusetts State Legislature to lower the city's voting age to 17⁶;
20 and

21 thepetition is currently being considered by the Massachusetts State Legislature and has
22 garnered the support of several state lawmakers⁷; and

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24 ⁴ See Hart and Atkins, supra note 2

25 ⁶ United Teen Equity Equality Center (Lowell, Massachusetts), "Vote 17." Accessed December 1, 2014.
<https://www.utec-lowell.org/actnow/vote17>

1 WHEREAS, In May 2013, Takoma Park of Maryland became the first municipality in
2 the United States to reduce its legal voting age to 16 years of age⁸; and

3 WHEREAS, Voter turnout among these newly enfranchised voters in Takoma Park was
4 44 percent, as compared to the overall voter turnout which was 11 percent⁹.

5 WHEREAS, The Scottish government allowed 16 and 17 year olds to vote in its referendum
6 on declaring independence from the United Kingdom¹⁰; and these 16 and 17 year old voters
7 used this opportunity to exercise their newfound right to vote, with over 80% of 16 and 17 year
8 old voters registering to vote in the Scottish independence referendum¹¹; and

9 WHEREAS, Resolutions adopted by the San Francisco Youth Commission (Resolution
10 0405-013 adopted on June 6, 2005¹²) and the San Francisco Board of Supervisors have
11 supported expanding suffrage to citizens of 16 years and older (Resolution 538-05 adopted on
12 July 12, 2005¹³) in municipal elections; and

15 ⁷ Russell Goldman, "Mass. Teens Inch Closer to Lowering Voting Age to 17," *ABC News*, April 19, 2012.
16 Accessed December 1, 2014. <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/mass-teens-inch-closer-lowering-voting-age/story?id=16166922>

17 ⁸ Lindsay A. Powers, "Takoma Part grants 16-year-olds right to vote," *The Washington Post*, May 14, 2013.
18 Accessed December 6, 2014. http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/takoma-park-grants-16-year-olds-right-to-vote/2013/05/14/b27c52c4-bccd-11e2-89c9-3be8095fe767_story.html

19 ⁹ J.B. Wogan, "Takoma Park Sees High Turnout Among Teens After Election Reform," *Governing*, November 7,
20 2013. Accessed December 6, 2014. <http://www.governing.com/news/headlines/gov-maryland-city-sees-high-turnout-among-teens-after-election-reform.html>

21 ¹⁰ The Electoral Commission Lothian Chambers, 59--63 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH1 1RN. (2014). *The
22 2014 Scottish Independence Voting Guide*. Accessed December 6, 2014.
http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/170400/The-2014-Scottish-Independence-Referendum-Voting-Guide.pdf

23 ¹¹ Rodney Jefferson, "Most Scottish Teenagers Register to Vote in September Referendum," *Bloomberg News*,
24 May 1, 2013. Accessed December 6, 2014. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-05-01/most-scottish-teenagers-register-to-vote-in-september-referendum.html>

25 ¹² San Francisco Youth Commission Resolution 0405—AL013 "Resolution Urging the San Francisco Board of
Supervisors to Recommend to State Legislators That They Allow Local Choice, For Which City or County Could
Permit Persons 16 years of Age or Older to Vote In City or County Elections," adopted June 6, 2005

¹³ "Resolution urging the California Legislature to pass a bill that will allow local choice legislation, for which any
city or country could permit persons 16 years or older to vote in city or county elections." San Francisco Board of
Supervisors. Accessed December 6, 2014.
<https://sfgov.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=2583879&GUID=7B2703EE-19B3-4EE2-8775-94A4BEB38779>

1 WHEREAS, The San Francisco Youth Commission adopted Resolution No. 1314—
2 02¹⁴ that called on for the Board of Supervisors and Youth-Serving Commissions to create a
3 “Youth Voice” Policy that would allow more young people to come to testify at public meetings
4 to voice their concerns and opinions on legislation that would directly impact them; and

5 WHEREAS, The San Francisco Board of Supervisors added Rule 2.12.1¹⁵ to the Board
6 of Supervisors’ Rules of Order, providing more opportunities for young people to meaningfully
7 participate in public meetings; and

8 WHEREAS, As stated in Section 4.124 of the San Francisco City Charter, the Youth
9 Commission is charged with identifying and proposing solutions to meet the unmet needs and
10 concerns of San Francisco youth, and the right to vote in city and school district elections is
11 an unmet need; and now, therefore, be it

12 RESOLVED, That the Youth Commission urges the Mayor and the Board of
13 Supervisors to lower San Francisco’s city and school district voting age eligibility to 16 years
14 of age or older; and be it

15 FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Youth Commission urges the Mayor and the Board of
16 Supervisors to prepare a charter amendment to relevant sections of the San Francisco
17 Charter, including the San Francisco Municipal Elections Code, allowing citizens of 16 years
18 of age and older to vote and register in municipal and school district elections held in the City
19 and County of San Francisco.

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23 ¹⁴ San Francisco Youth Commission Resolution 1313—02 “Resolution Urging the San Francisco Board of
24 Supervisors and Youth-Serving Commissions to Support the Creation of a Youth Voice Policy,” adopted March
25 3, 2014

¹⁵ “Motion amending the Board of Supervisors Rules of Order, by adding Rule 2.12.2, to establish
communication procedures for hearings on matters related to the Youth Commission.” San Francisco Board of
Supervisors. Accessed December 6, 2014.
<https://sfgov.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=3276905&GUID=8ACEC527-F5C4-4E6B-99FF-450D9B60A3BE>