

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**
3 **legal 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

21

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

14 WHEREAS, Between 2000 and 2013, San Francisco lost about 8,000⁶ school age
15 youth and now has the lowest percentage⁷ of kids of any major U.S. city; and

16 WHEREAS, The young people impacted by these trends are best positioned to identify
17 solutions, and their political enfranchisement is a vital step; and

18 WHEREAS, The city has seen fit to make investments in the leadership and civic
19 engagement of young people through DCYF's Youth Leadership and Organizing programs,
20 Youth Empowerment Fund, and annual Youth Advocacy Day, among other initiatives; and

21

22 ⁴ See Hart and Atkins, supra note 2

23 ⁵ Ibid

24 ⁶ Heather Knight, "Families' exodus leaves S.F. whiter, less diverse," *The San Francisco Chronicle*, June 10,
2013. Accessed December 12, 2014. <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Families-exodus-leaves-S-F-whiter-less-diverse-3393637.php>

25 ⁷ Aaron Sankin, "Families Flee San Francisco: City Has Lowest Percentage Of Kids Of Any Major U.S. City," *The Huffington Post; San Francisco*, March 11, 2012. Accessed December 12, 2014.
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/09/families-flee-san-francisco_n_1335639.html

1 WHEREAS, As an example, on Tuesday, October 14th, over 90 young people
2 attended a Young Voters Forum designed to educate youth on the various issues facing San
3 Francisco this election year and how these will impact their lives and those of their peers and
4 family; and

5 WHEREAS, A majority of the attendees were under 18, and participated in the Young
6 Voters Forum and meaningfully contributed to the discussion regarding various ballot
7 measures as they explored them; and

8 WHEREAS, The non-partisan event was put on by the San Francisco Youth
9 Commission, TAYSF, San Francisco Youth Warriors, Youth Leadership Institute, Peer
10 Resources, the Student Advisory Council and Coleman Advocates; and

11 WHEREAS, Staff from the San Francisco Department of Elections was on hand to
12 register new voters and recruit young people to work the polls on Election Day; and

13 WHEREAS, The efforts of these engaged youth leaders have been very fruitful, with
14 the city benefiting from several policy and legislative campaigns initiated and led by young
15 people all around the city, including most recently an ordinance amending the health code and
16 establishing limitations for the granting of new tobacco sales permits (File No. 141098⁸),
17 which was finally passed by the Board of Supervisors on December 9, 2014.

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

22

23

24 ⁸ “Ordinance amending the Health Code by adding density, proximity, and sales establishment limitations on the
25 granting of new tobacco sales permits, and renumbering all sections in Article 19H; amending the Business and
Tax Regulations Code by increasing the annual license and application fees; and making environmental finding,”
adopted by the Board of Supervisors on December 9, 2014. Accessed December 12, 2014.

<https://sfgov.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=3413121&GUID=9590AFB0-D62E-4BC6-944C-3375C6D90322>

1 WHEREAS, In December 2010, Lowell of Massachusetts's City Council passed a
2 resolution petitioning the Massachusetts State Legislature to lower the city's voting age to 17⁹;
3 and the petition is currently being considered by the Massachusetts State Legislature and has
4 garnered the support of several state lawmakers¹⁰; and

5 WHEREAS, In May 2013, Takoma Park of Maryland became the first municipality in
6 the United States to reduce its legal voting age to 16 years of age¹¹; and

7 WHEREAS, Voter turnout among these newly enfranchised voters in Takoma Park was
8 44 percent, as compared to the overall voter turnout which was 11 percent¹².

9 WHEREAS, The Scottish government allowed 16 and 17 year olds to vote in its
10 referendum on declaring independence from the United Kingdom¹³; and

11 WHEREAS, These 16 and 17 year old voters used this opportunity to exercise their
12 newfound right to vote, with over 80% of 16 and 17 year old voters registering to vote in the
13 Scottish independence referendum¹⁴; and

14 WHEREAS, Resolutions adopted by the San Francisco Youth Commission (Resolution
15 0405-013 adopted on June 6, 2005¹⁵) and the San Francisco Board of Supervisors have
16

17 _____
18 ⁹ United Teen Equity Equality Center (Lowell, Massachusetts), "Vote 17." Accessed December 1, 2014.
<https://www.utec-lowell.org/actnow/vote17>

19 ¹⁰ Russell Goldman, "Mass. Teens Inch Closer to Lowering Voting Age to 17," *ABC News*, April 19, 2012.
Accessed December 1, 2014. <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/mass-teens-inch-closer-lowering-voting-age/story?id=16166922>

20 ¹¹ Lindsay A. Powers, "Takoma Part grants 16-year-olds right to vote," *The Washington Post*, May 14, 2013.
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

21 ¹² J.B. Wogan, "Takoma Park Sees High Turnout Among Teens After Election Reform," *Governing*, November 7,
22 2013. Accessed December 6, 2014. <http://www.governing.com/news/headlines/gov-maryland-city-sees-high-turnout-among-teens-after-election-reform.html>

23 ¹³ The Electoral Commission Lothian Chambers, 59--63 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH1 1RN. (2014). *The
24 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

25 ¹⁴ Rodney Jefferson, "Most Scottish Teenagers Register to Vote in September Referendum," *Bloomberg News*,
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>

1 supported expanding suffrage to citizens of 16 years and older (Resolution 538-05 adopted on
2 July 12, 2005¹⁶) in municipal elections; and

3 WHEREAS, The San Francisco Youth Commission adopted Resolution No. 1314—
4 02¹⁷ that called on for the Board of Supervisors and Youth-Serving Commissions to create a
5 “Youth Voice” Policy that would allow more young people to come to testify at public meetings
6 to voice their concerns and opinions on legislation that would directly impact them; and

7 WHEREAS, The San Francisco Board of Supervisors added Rule 2.12.1¹⁸ to the Board
8 of Supervisors’ Rules of Order, providing more opportunities for young people to meaningfully
9 participate in public meetings; and

10 WHEREAS, Many states are enacting laws designed to severely limit communities’ of
11 color and young people’s voting rights, rolling back gains won through a proud history of
12 struggle on behalf of African Americans and groups of young, multiracial activists.

13 WHEREAS, San Francisco has an opportunity to take bold action to reverse these
14 trends and stand for the political enfranchisement of young people.

15 WHEREAS, As stated in Section 4.124 of the San Francisco City Charter, the Youth
16 Commission is charged with identifying and proposing solutions to meet the unmet needs and
17 concerns of San Francisco youth; and

18

19

¹⁵ 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

20

¹⁶ “Resolution urging the California Legislature to pass a bill that will allow local choice legislation, for which any city or county could permit persons 16 years or older to vote in city or county elections.” San Francisco Board of Supervisors. Accessed December 6, 2014.

21

22

<https://sfgov.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=2583879&GUID=7B2703EE-19B3-4EE2-8775-94A4BEB38779>

23

24

¹⁷ San Francisco Youth Commission Resolution 1313—02 “Resolution Urging the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and Youth-Serving Commissions to Support the Creation of a Youth Voice Policy,” adopted March 3, 2014

25

¹⁸ “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.

26

<https://sfgov.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=3276905&GUID=8ACEC527-F5C4-4E6B-99FF-450D9B60A3BE>

1 WHEREAS, The Youth Commission believes that young people’s people ability to
2 engage in the electoral processes that directly impact them is an unmet need; and now,
3 therefore, be it

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

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

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25