[San Francisco Youth Commission Support of Richmond Youth Council’s Recommendation to Lower the Municipal Voting Age]

Supplemental Information

The Richmond Youth Council began considerations and investigations of the utility of lowering the municipal voting age in October 2015. Beginning in January 2016, they are preparing formal recommendations regarding lowering the voting age for the Richmond City Council. The San Francisco Youth Commission has done extensive investigation on the positive impacts these efforts would have on the civic participation of teens and young adults and we formally lend our support to the efforts of young people in our neighboring city to advance this important cause.

In addition, we opt to submit the following letter of support to the Richmond Youth Council and Richmond City Council:

Honorable Richmond City Councilors:

We hope this letter finds you well. We are the San Francisco Youth Commission, a chartered commission established by voters in 1995, we are a group of young San Franciscans between the ages of twelve and twenty three appointed by the San Francisco Mayor and Board of Supervisors to advise them on local youth-related issues and Board legislation. We are writing to extend our support to the Richmond Youth Council’s recommendation and efforts to lower the municipal voting age in Richmond to age 16.

The San Francisco Youth Commission has worked on this initiative since January 2015, after passing a resolution about lowering the voting age. On March 16, 2015, a charter amendment to allow 16 and 17 year olds to participate in local elections was introduced before the Board of Supervisors and is currently being considered before its Rules Committee. Youth around San Francisco have worked to raise awareness on this issue and to gain support on both a local and national level. We are pleased that the efforts have been the source of not only local discussion and debate, but recent national press in The New York Times, The Atlantic, The Wall Street Journal, and Bloomberg News.

Sixteen and seventeen year olds should be given the right to vote because we are both capable of exercising, and deserving of, a voice in the decisions affecting our daily lives. We already bear civic responsibilities, such as paying taxes, driving, and being able to be tried in adult courts. Extending the
right to vote to us is an investment in our civic development. It builds lifelong voters and engaged citizens. This initiative will involve young people more deeply in civic affairs and support us in voting for the first time in environments where we are most invested in local issues. A growing body of research, and the many examples of civic leadership among 16 and 17 year olds, show we are able to make independent choices in voting and critically analyze information to make informed decisions about issues facing our cities.

As young people, we have the most invested in issues like housing, transit, education, and violence prevention, but sadly voters ages 18-30 have the lowest voter turnout of any age group. We believe that allowing young people to vote on municipal issues for the first time while still in high school can change that.

We are writing to express our formal support of the Richmond Youth Council in their efforts to lower the voting age. We wish to extend our cooperation in helping them draft resolutions, speak to the Richmond Council, and raise awareness of the movement and the initiative’s efforts in San Francisco, the greater Bay Area, and on a national-level through the VOTE16 USA Youth Advisory Board, on which Richmond youth councilors already sit.

We look forward to continued collaboration with both Richmond’s youth and elected leaders on this important issue.

Sincerely,

The 2015-16 San Francisco Youth Commission

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Adopted on January 4, 2016

Commissioner Jillian Wu
SAN FRANCISCO YOUTH COMMISSION