

# FAQS – EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE TO VOTE IN THE ACT

## Why should voting rights be extended to 16 and 17 year olds?

Empowering young people to have a say at the voting booth will motivate politicians from all parties to take the concerns of young people seriously. They will need to create good policy and be held to account when it comes to decisions that impact young people, now and into the future. Overseas research has shown that when politicians speak to, and create good policy with and for young people, this motivates and engages young people to participate in their democratic system and society at large.

## Why does the Bill support mandatory voting rather than voluntary?

Mandatory voting is central to maintaining the high quality of our Australian democracy. It ensures that politicians address the needs of all voters, and that people are not disenfranchised from the voting system. Our Bill respects this fundamental part of our democracy.

Trying to implement non-compulsory voting would go against the terms of the Hare Clark Entrenchment Act. We understand that, like our adult population, there will be some young people who do not wish to vote or find it difficult to do so. However, from our engagement with young people and youth organisations, we believe that overwhelmingly, young people want to be able to vote and have a real say in their society.

We anticipate that some difficulties may arise as this is a first-of-its-kind endeavour in Australia. However, we hope that through this process, the voting system will be refined to make voting and civics education more accessible and easy to understand, which will better assist both young people and adults to navigate our voting system and democratic processes.

## What about fines for young people who don't vote?

The ACT Greens would much prefer young people to exercise their democratic right and not incur a fine in the first place. Due to legislative barriers within the ACT, we must have penalties included in the legislation. However, we have sought to minimise the default notice fine as much as possible. The legislation lowers the default notice fine for not voting to \$10. The ACT Greens are sympathetic to community concerns regarding fining systems and understand that \$10 is still a lot of money to some

people. This is why there is an existing process in place to waive fines for people experiencing financial hardship. This would also be extended to 16 and 17 year olds.

## How are you going to support young people to be able to vote?

Earlier this year, the ACT Government supported an ACT Greens motion to enhance civics and democracy education in our school curriculum. The motion also called for extra educational resources for young people to be provided by the Electoral Commission and the Office of the Legislative Assembly. The ACT Greens want to support educators and the Electoral Commission to develop programs to prepare young people to vote through civics education.

We expect the ACT Government to maintain an ongoing discussion with young people, youth organisations and school communities, to best understand what support is needed and to develop them swiftly and comprehensively.

## This legislation only applies to ACT elections, not federal elections. Why should young people care about local issues?

Young people under the age of 18 make up a quarter of the population, a third if you count people aged under 24. Young people interact with the ACT Government in a variety of ways - through their public education, through health services, catching public transport and obtaining driver's licenses (to name a few). For every federal issue there is a local angle that the population can engage with and take action on.

The Commonwealth Government is the only government that can alter an elector base for federal elections. This legislation would thus only apply to ACT elections.

## Why 16?

Educational [research](#) shows that by 16, teens can process complex problems, imagine future consequences of actions and think abstractly. We recognise this in our society by affording 16 year olds an array of new freedoms and rights, [including](#) getting a learners permit, consenting to medical and dental treatment, enlisting in the armed forces, consenting to have sex, and getting body piercings. In other jurisdictions such as Scotland, 16-17 year old voter turnout [is consistent](#) with the over 18 population. When it comes to expanding voting rights in the ACT, 16 year olds have told us that they are able to and enthusiastic about having a greater say in their society in this way.