

STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
11<sup>th</sup> LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT  
STEVE BERGQUIST  
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ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE  
Solicitor General's Division

November 3, 2017

Attorney General Bob Ferguson  
PO Box 40100  
1125 Washington St SE  
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Attorney General Ferguson,

Recently I have been talking with Ryan Montang, a teacher of civics and U.S. history at University High School in Spokane Valley, Washington. Students in Spokane Valley have been discussing the legal possibility of changing the voting age to 17 for elections within the city's jurisdiction. The curriculum of the civics class and interest in the political issues surrounding the city made many students wish that they had the right to vote in the upcoming election. The students' interests led them to investigate municipalities in other states, such as California and Maryland, which have passed measures allowing 16 and 17 year olds to vote. The students have also researched Washington state legislation along with the State Constitution and have come to the conclusion that Article VI was written to be inclusive and not exclusive in nature. They conclude, therefore, that the clause does not forbid local governments from further extending the right to vote.

Permitting 17 year old citizens the right to vote would have two main positive implications. First, nearly all 17 year olds must take a civics class in their high school. They study the U.S. and state Constitution, and the structure of government. They take ideology tests, debate policy and become familiar with their representatives, arguably making them some of the most informed constituents in the eligible voting population. Second, the change would increase voter turnout over time. With voter turnout as low as 30% at times, efforts to improve turnout are crucial. If 17 year old students were allowed to exercise the right to vote while they were seniors taking a Civics class, it would initiate the habit of voting which they would carry with them for a lifetime.

Due to all this, I am requesting a formal opinion from your office on these two questions:

1. May a city, county, or school district pass a measure allowing individuals who have reached the age of 17, but not yet reached the age of 18, to vote in elections of that jurisdiction?
2. If the answer to question 1 is "no," would a state statute that either allows individuals who have reached the age of 17, but not yet reached the age of 18, to vote in local elections or that allows a city, county, or school district to allow them to vote at local option, be consistent with Article VI, § 1 of the Washington Constitution?

Thank you for your work on this. If you'd like to discuss this further, please don't hesitate to contact me.

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE: 322 JOHN L. O'BRIEN BUILDING • PO BOX 40600, OLYMPIA, WA 98504-0600 • 360-786-7862

E-MAIL: Steve.Bergquist@leg.wa.gov

TOLL-FREE LEGISLATIVE HOTLINE: 1-800-562-6000 • TDD: 1-800-635-9993 • www.leg.wa.gov

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STATE OF WASHINGTON  
GSE/OLYMPIA

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "SAB", written in a cursive style.

Steve Bergquist  
State Representative  
11<sup>th</sup> Legislative District

Cc: Jeff Even