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NUTAQQANUT INULRAMIRNULLU
UGAQTIKHAANIK

REPRÉSENTANT DE
L'ENFANCE ET DE LA JEUNESSE

REPRESENTATIVE FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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October 20, 2021

Dear Nunavummiut,

In January 2021, grade 11 students at Inukshuk High School, in Iqaluit, worked together on a project to share their opinions on why the voting age for Canadian federal elections should be lowered from 18 to 16 years of age. This project was in support of Bill S-209, *an Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Regulation Adapting the Canada Elections Act for the Purposes of a Referendum* (Bill S-209). One of the students who took part in the project, Penelope Armstrong, said, “We wholeheartedly believe that people our age deserve the opportunity to participate formally in the democratic process.”¹

As an Advocacy Summer Student at the Representative for Children and Youth’s Office (RCYO), I was asked to review and consider this issue. What I learned is detailed below.

The voting age in Canada was originally set at 21 years of age because it was believed that that was the age a person was “considered mature enough to participate in the democratic process and vote in elections”.² During the first and second world wars, military personnel were offered the right to vote, regardless of their age, and then in 1970, the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 years of age.³

Today, the age of majority, the age a young person is considered an adult by law, varies between 18 and 19 years of age across Canada.⁴ In Nunavut, the age of majority is 19, but a person 18 years of age can vote in both territorial and federal election.⁵ At 16 years of age, a person enrolled under the Nunavut

¹ Nunatsiq News. (2021, April 21). *Iqaluit high school make the case for lower voting age*. Retrieved from <https://nunatsiq.com/stories/article/igaluit-high-school-students-make-the-case-for-lower-voting-age/>

² Elections Canada. (2021). *Youth and the Right to Vote Case Study*. Retrieved from <https://electionsanddemocracy.ca/voting-rights-through-time-0/case-study-3-youth-and-vote>

³ Elections Canada. (2021). *Youth and the Right to Vote Case Study*. Retrieved from <https://electionsanddemocracy.ca/voting-rights-through-time-0/case-study-3-youth-and-vote>

⁴ Government of Canada. (2021). *Provincial definitions of a minor*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/refugee-protection/canada/processing-provincial-definitions-minor.html>

⁵ Elections Canada. (2021). *Canada’s Election Process*. Retrieved <https://electionsanddemocracy.ca/canadas-elections/canadas-election-process/election-voting>

Agreement can vote in Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI) elections.⁶ Also at 16 years of age, a person is eligible to get their driver's license,⁷ a job,⁸ and potentially pay taxes.⁹

As a Canadian citizen, it is our civic duty, meaning our responsibility, to vote in federal elections since we are directly impacted by decisions the government makes. One of the greatest responsibilities that comes with practicing the right to vote is to make an informed choice and cast an educated vote. To do so, prior to voting, a voter should research each candidate and decide whom they feel will best represent them and the issues that are important to them when decisions are made on their behalf by government.

To get a drivers license, a person must pass both written and practical examinations, as well as obey all traffic laws at all times. To maintain employment, a person must take on all responsibilities that come with having a job and potentially paying taxes. As such, a person 16 years of age is capable of researching candidates and forming their own opinion on who they feel is the best choice.

In my opinion, as a young person, I believe that the voting age should be lowered for the following reasons:

- Supporting young people to become familiar with the political system may support them to become active citizens in their community, territory, and country. This would be beneficial for our collective future.
- The number of voters may increase, supporting that those elected are representative of more Nunavummiut and Canadians.
- The opinions and thoughts of young people matter. They have the right to have a say in their future and the decisions made on their behalf.

Given current technologies that increase exposure and awareness of global issues, being a young person today is different from being a young person more than half a century ago, when the voting age was determined. Maiya Twerdin, an Inukshuk High School student involved in the project said, "Granting the vote to young adults 16 years and older should be part of modernizing our political system."¹⁰ If a person 16 years of age can vote in some elections; drive a vehicle; maintain employment; pay taxes; and

⁶ Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporation. (2021, January 5). *NTI Election – Revised Notice of Election*. Retrieved from <https://www.tunngavik.com/news/nti-election-revised-notice-of-election/>

⁷ Government of Nunavut. (2021). *How do I get a driver's licence?* Retrieved from <https://www.gov.nu.ca/how-do-i-get-drivers-licence#:~:text=At%20the%20age%20of%2016%20you%20can%20get,licence%20in%20Nunavut%20from%20the%20Motor%20Vehicles%20Office.>

⁸ Some restrictions apply as per the Nunavut Labour Standards Compliance Office. Government of Nunavut. (2021). Labour Standards Compliance Office. *Employment of Young Persons/Education Work Experience*. Retrieved from <http://www.nu-lsco.ca/faq-s>

⁹ "If the total is \$40,000 or less, you probably do not have to pay minimum tax. If the total is more than \$40,000, you may have to pay minimum tax." Government of Canada. (2021). *Minimum tax*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/individuals/topics/about-your-tax-return/tax-return/completing-a-tax-return/deductions-credits-expenses/minimum-tax.html>

¹⁰ Nunatsiaq News. (2021, April 21). *Iqaluit high school make the case for lower voting age*. Retrieved from <https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/iqaluit-high-school-students-make-the-case-for-lower-voting-age/>

in some cases, make decisions on their own behalf, they should also have the right to vote in all elections.

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child says that young people have the right to give their opinion and adults should consider their opinions when making decisions on their behalf,¹¹ which is why the RCYO and I support Bill S-209 and lowering the voting age to 16 years of age.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sylvia', written in a cursive style.

Sylvia Kablutsiak
Advocacy Summer Student 2021

¹¹ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2017). *Convention on the rights of the child*. Geneva, CH: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text>