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SECRETARY OF THE STATE  
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- NEWS RELEASE -

## SEC. BYSIEWICZ WANTS 17 YEAR-OLDS TO BE ABLE TO VOTE

BYSIEWICZ & REP. SPALLONE STAND WITH TEENS FROM ACROSS CONNECTICUT &  
PUSH FOR STATE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

**Hartford:** Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz, State Rep. James Spallone, educators and teens from across Connecticut, including the towns of Essex, West Haven, Middletown, and West Hartford stood together at a news conference Thursday at the Old Judiciary Room in the State Capitol to support a proposed constitutional amendment that would give thousands of 17 year-olds the right to vote.

“Connecticut should be among the national leaders when it comes to voting rights,” said Bysiewicz. “Giving 17 year-olds the right to vote will increase turnout, make political candidates more accountable, and address a shocking inequity in our laws that allows a 17 year-old to enlist in the military but not vote.”

House Joint Resolution No. 11 states, “That article fourteenth of the amendments to the Constitution of the State be amended to authorize seventeen-year-old persons who pre-register to vote and who will attain the age of eighteen years on or before the day of a regular election to vote in a primary for such regular election.”

Despite what many assume to be the law, the United States Constitution does not deny 17 year-olds the right to vote. The 26th Amendment to the United States Constitution only states that the right of citizens who are eighteen years of age or older to vote shall not be denied by the United

States or by any State on account of age. Taking into account that the Constitution does not bar states from lowering the voting age, some states have done exactly that. In the past several years nine other states in the nation have passed measures that allow 17 year-olds to vote in primaries so long as they turn 18 by the general election. The states are; Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, and Virginia.

“In 1971, as young men were being sent to Vietnam, the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the U.S. Constitution was ratified, lowering the voting age from 21 to 18,” said Sec. Bysiewicz. “Lawmakers thought it was unfair that someone could serve our nation in combat but not have the right to vote. Today there are 17 year-old men and women who have enlisted in the armed services and are fighting a war in our name but they cannot vote. That is wrong and this measure would address that inequity.”

Lowering the voting age to 17, with said restrictions, would also increase voter participation among young people and help create life long voters. According to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at the University of Maryland, if you vote once you are 4-5 times more likely to vote again than if you never voted.

“By lowering the age to 17 we would ensure that the majority of high school seniors would be able to vote,” said Sec. Bysiewicz. “This, coupled with the civics requirement in high school that I fought for, is a great one-two punch that will encourage thousands of young people to participate in the electoral process.”

State Rep. Spallone, 36<sup>th</sup> District – representing the towns of Chester, Deep River, Essex and Haddam - said, “Current news and events, from national security to global warming, remind us every day that young people have a tremendous stake in the outcome of today's political campaigns and policy decisions. This amendment will enfranchise thousands of 17 year-olds, and give them a voice in choosing candidates for a general election in which they are already eligible to vote.”

Spallone continued, “The amendment will help high school students develop the important habit of voting while still living at home, a habit they will hopefully continue during their typically mobile 20's. With more students eligible to vote in primaries, there will be more discussion about candidates and issues among young people, and, it is hoped, more participation in campaigns. Finally, if the youth voter turnout is increased, politicians will pay more attention to issues affecting young people, from education to war and peace.”

Joining Sec. Bysiewicz and Rep. Spallone at the news conference were dozens of students from across Connecticut, representing Mercy High School in Middletown, Hall High School in West Hartford, Notre Dame High School in West Haven, and Valley Regional High School in Essex. “I feel this bill is necessary to increase voter participation within the state,” said John Giammatteo, President of the Millard Fillmore Political Action Club at Notre Dame High School. “By allowing seventeen year-olds to vote in the primaries, we will be inspiring a lifelong interest in the whole political experience within the younger generation, ensuring civic responsibility for years to come.”

Many young political activists were also in attendance, including Matthew Lesser, President of the College Democrats of Connecticut. “This proposal is a necessary step in encouraging soon-to-be adults to begin participating in the democratic process. If seventeen is not too early to work or join the military, it is certainly not too young to vote,” said Lesser.

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