



**Kimberly Williams**  
STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
19th District

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STATE OF DELAWARE  
411 LEGISLATIVE AVENUE  
DOVER, DELAWARE 19901

COMMITTEES  
Education, Chair  
Labor, Vice Chair  
Joint Finance  
Revenue & Finance  
Appropriations

## **Education Committee Meeting Minutes**

5.3.23

*This committee meeting has been recorded and may be accessed via [legis.delaware.gov](http://legis.delaware.gov)*

Chair Williams called the meeting to order at 3:02 p.m. Members present included Vice Chair Moore, and Reps. Chukwuocha, Hilovsky, Morrison, Osienski, Phillips, Parker Selby, Romer, Collins, Hilovsky, Postles, Smith, Shupe. For a list of guests present, please see the attendance list below.

### **Chair Williams introduced **HS 1 for HB 83, AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 14 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO ORAL HEALTH SCREENINGS.****

Chair Williams, the prime sponsor of the bill, said HS 1 for HB 83 requires public and charter schools to provide kindergarten students with an oral health screening by the last student attendance day of each school year. She said oral health care is vital for our children's physical, mental and social health. The screening will be provided by the Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services Smile Check Program, led by Dr. Nick Conte, with no cost to the school districts. In this substitute bill, file law requirements were removed because it would complicate existing law.

At the request of the Chair, Dr. Nick Conte, Dental Director of the Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services, said each year children are losing valuable days of school, with the CDC estimating an annual average of 34 million school hours lost, due to unplanned emergency dental care. He said according to CATCH Healthy Smiles, a program dedicated to student oral health, children with poor oral health are three times more likely to miss school and two times more likely to perform poorly compared to a student with better oral health. Dr. Conte stated efforts such as the Smile Check program can provide much needed intervention. The bill would also allow the state to objectively assess the oral health of Delaware's kindergarten students and provide families with resources related to oral health.

Rep. Parker Selby commented that in her experience with the segregated school system, dental checks in school were a normal and helpful program to have.

Rep. Hilovsky voiced support for the bill. He said he has seen the positive impact of providing vision screenings to children, saying if a child is in pain or uncomfortable, he or she will not be able to concentrate.

411 Legislative Avenue, Legislative Hall, House of Representatives,  
Dover, Delaware 19901 House Offices: Wilmington: (302) 577-8476  
Dover: (302) 744-4351 Fax: (302) 739-2313  
Email: [Kimberly.Williams@delaware.gov](mailto:Kimberly.Williams@delaware.gov)

Chair Williams opened the floor for public comment.

Dr. John Marinucci, Executive Director of the Delaware School Boards Association, expressed support for the bill. He appreciated the sponsors willingness to work with DASA on this substitute bill.

Kendall Massett, Executive Director for the Delaware Charter Schools Network (DCSN), shared a personal story about her grandfather, a dentist, providing care to his community. She voiced support for the bill.

Dr. Tammy Croce, Executive Director of the Delaware Association of School Administrators (DASA), said DASA supports the bill. She commented that from her experience as a health teacher, she knows how impactful this bill will be. She thanked the sponsor for bringing the legislation forward.

Robert Overmiller said he supports this legislation.

A motion was made by Vice Chair Moore and seconded by Rep. Chukwuocha to release HS 1 for HB 83 from committee; motion carried. Yes = 13 (Chukwuocha, Collins, Hilovsky, Moore, Morrison, Osienski, Phillips, Postles, Romer, Parker Selby, Shupe, Smith, Williams); Absent = 3 (Hensley, Lynn, Neal). The bill was released from committee with a F = 7, M = 5, U = 0 vote.

**Chair Williams introduced HB 116, AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 14 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO ADVANCED PLACEMENT EXAMINATIONS.**

Chair Williams, the prime sponsor of HB 116, said families gear a lot of effort towards Advanced Placement (AP) courses and they deserve to know how that effort is going to translate in a state institution of higher learning. This bill requires all public institutions of higher education to grant credit for AP exams with a score of three, which is considered passing or higher. Institutions can require a higher score if credit is being used for meeting a course requirement for a particular major or type of program. The bill also requires public institutions to publish a list of the number and type of credits awarded for each AP exam on their websites. This legislation fits into the Department of Education's Prior Credit Learning Framework which works to provide resources and opportunities for earning credit for postsecondary education before its beginning. Chair Williams mentioned the letter of support from the College Board states that 36 states have already implemented this policy. She said if all students were awarded credit for a score of three or above in 2022, potential savings for students and families would have been \$10 million.

Chair Williams opened the floor for public comment.

Dr. John Marinucci said DSBA supports this bill.

Jacki Griffith, Vice President of Government and Community Relations at Delaware State University (DSU), accompanied by Dr. Sandra DeLauder, the Provost of DSU, and Antonio Boyle, VP of Strategic Enrollment at DSU, voiced support for the bill on behalf of the university. She said DSU will be joining other institutions of higher education in implementing this best practice policy.

Dr. Tammy Croce said DASA supports HB 116 and thanked the sponsor for involving DASA in the drafting process.

Robert Overmiller expressed support for the legislation.

A motion was made by Vice Chair Moore and seconded by Rep. Morrison to release HB 116 from committee; motion carried. Yes = 13 (Chukwuocha, Collins, Hilovsky, Moore, Morrison, Osienski, Phillips, Postles, Romer, Parker Selby, Shupe, Smith, Williams); Absent = 3 (Hensley, Lynn, Neal). The bill was released from committee with a F= 7, M= 5, U= vote.

Chair Williams introduced **HB 200, AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 14 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.**

Rep. Longhurst, prime sponsor of the bill, said the state recently acknowledged it has a major mental health crisis. She shared some statistics about the situation, stating 50 percent of all lifelong mental health cases begin at the age of fourteen and 70 percent of youth in the state juvenile system have a mental illness. This bill requires all Delaware high schools to implement a mental health services unit.

Chair Williams asked if the additional mental health professionals will work with already existing wellness centers.

Rep. Longhurst said social workers, counselors, and psychologists work in tandem to provide comprehensive services to students. She said she is completely sure all professionals will work together as a community to offer the best care to students.

Chair Williams opened the floor for public comment.

Jenn Jankowski, Peer Services Manager with the National Alliance on Mental Illness, voiced support for the bill. She said prevention and early intervention are key to protecting the high number of young individuals suffering from mental illness.

Chair Williams thanked Ms. Jankowski for her work.

Margie López Waite, Head of the Las Américas ASPIRA Academy, voiced support for the bill on behalf of the charter school community. She said the distinction made between school counselors, psychologists, and social workers in the bill and the opportunity for reimbursement for teachers working to get certified is appreciated.

Gloria Ho, NEA Director with the Delaware State Education Association (DSEA) and social worker in Milton Elementary School, spoke in support of the bill. Speaking from her personal experience, she testified on the positive impacts of implementing mental health professionals in elementary schools. She said HB 200 is greatly needed as it helps bridge the gap in access to mental health care.

Taylor Hawk, Director of Legislative and Political Strategy at DSEA, voiced support for the bill on behalf of DSEA. She said DSEA values providing long-term stable funding for essential mental health professionals in Delaware schools.

Shirin Skovronski, School Counselor at Christina School District, expressed support for HB 200. She stated examples of a school counselor's daily duties, highlighting the position's necessity in school.

Megan Williams, Vice President of the Delaware Healthcare Association (DHA), spoke in support of the bill. She said DHA member organizations support the state's school based wellness centers and look forward to collaborating with the implementation of this bill.

Sarah Stowens, Manager of Delaware Policy and Advocacy at Christiana Care, voiced support on behalf of Christiana Care. She emphasized the importance of mental health, saying the increase in mental health support is critical for the wellness of Delaware adolescents.

Krissy Hall, from the Delaware School Counselor Association, said she supports the bill and thanked the sponsors for bringing this legislation forward. She said all students deserve access to school counselors and mental health support.

Dr. John Marinucci said DSBA supports this bill and has supported other bills focused on increasing mental health support for students in the past.

Dr. Tammy Croce said DASA supports HB 200.

Kristin Dwyer, External Affairs Manager for the Nemours Children's Hospital, spoke in support of HB 200. She said early identification is key to treating and managing behavioral health issues.

Robert Overmiller said he supports the bill.

Angela Kimble, from Inseparable, voiced support for the legislation and urged the committee to continue working to address mental health.

Linda Barnett, from the League of Women Voters, spoke in support of HB 200. She said professionals should be the ones to help students tackle mental health issues instead of having that responsibility inadvertently fall on others.

Tracy Murphy, from the Delaware Coalition Against Gun Violence, said firearm death, including death by firearm suicide, is the leading cause of death for adolescents in Delaware. She voiced support for the bill, saying HB 200 places mental health identification and prevention mechanisms in schools.

Kirsten Olsen, CEO of Children and Families First, stated she supports HB 200, emphasizing that mental health professionals make a significant positive impact in schools.

Rep. Smith thanked Rep. Longhurst for her continued work addressing mental health in the state.

Rep. Chukwuocha commented he hopes youth in the state's juvenile detention centers are offered the same support.

A motion was made by Rep. Smith and seconded by Vice Chair Moore to release HB 200 from committee; motion carried. Yes = 13 (Chukwuocha, Collins, Hilovsky, Moore, Morrison,

Osienski, Phillips, Postles, Romer, Selby, Shupe, Smith, Williams); Absent = 3 (Hensley, Lynn, Neal). The bill was released from committee with a F = 7, M = 6, U = 0 vote.

Chair Williams introduced **HB 96, AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 14 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO VOTING IN SCHOOL ELECTIONS.**

Rep. Morrison, the prime sponsor of HB 96, said this bill lowers the school board election voting age from 18 to 16. It does not affect the voting age for school referendums, which will remain at 18. Rep. Morrison said the Department of Elections (DOE) have no logistical concerns regarding the bill. He cited some jurisdictions in the nation that have lowered their school board and local election voting ages to 16 with no major consequences. He said students have a strong vested interest in choosing school board members, who make decisions directly affecting them. He stated the younger an individual starts voting, the more likely they will be a lifelong voter. At 16, individuals can already take on more responsibilities including obtaining a driver's license, paying taxes, and can be tried as adults in a criminal court. He said organizations such as the Delaware Voting Rights Coalition, ACLU Delaware, and the Delaware Coalition for Open Government support this bill.

Rep. Romer said she has heard both sides on this issue. She voiced support for engaging young individuals in voting and the democratic process at an early age, but expressed concern about students, who go to non-traditional schools, charter, private or vo-tech schools, being able to vote for elections that do not concern their school. She also raised concerns about allowing students to practice their voting right through school board elections, which have become increasingly polarized.

Rep. Morrison noted that parents with children in non-traditional schools are allowed to vote in school board elections. He expressed dismay at the increasing polarization of most elections, but said school board elections are nonpartisan, which allows students to research the candidate and be a more involved voter.

Rep. Parker Selby said through personal experience as a social science and civics teacher, she knows most students do not have the life experience or interest to participate productively in school board elections.

Rep. Morrisson said through his experience as a civics teacher, he knows there are many students who would benefit from participation in the school board election process. He emphasized that voting rights are not contingent on how an individual will vote. He said studies have found individuals at 16 do not vote significantly different than individuals at 18.

Rep. Parker Selby said there is not enough education on school boards to allow 16 year old students to vote.

Rep. Morrison agreed there needs to be more education on school boards.

Rep. Smith voiced concern about this bill inadvertently allowing students to vote in school referendums, which he said he opposes as they do not pay taxes. He appreciated the intent of the bill trying to promote civics education, but said he hopes to see students more engaged with school boards before they are allowed to vote in the elections.

Rep. Morrison said this bill was specifically designed to not let students inadvertently vote in school referendums. He stated the committee should not hold students to a standard that voting adults do not have to meet.

Rep. Smith said he does not believe in allowing individuals to vote in one election while barring them from voting in others. Though he voiced opposition to the bill, he said he would be willing to work on a bill to reform the school board election system with Rep. Morrison.

Rep. Chukwuocha said he appreciated the sponsor's intention with the bill but had concerns about the legislation. He recalled a recent incident between a school board member harming a minor. Rep. Chukwuocha said interactions between 16-year-old individuals, minors, and school board candidates might need to be monitored and regulated differently due to safety reasons.

Rep. Morrison replied there are many situations where 16- and 17-year-olds associate with adults. He said in the mentioned recent situation, the school board member had access to the child through familial connections rather than through his position.

Rep. Chukwuocha opposed the idea of school board members having direct access to children as voting constituents.

Rep. Morrison said legislative candidates interact with children while campaigning frequently.

Rep. Chukwuocha asked if there are any or should be any guidelines concerning minors' interactions with electoral candidates.

At the request of the Chair, Anthony Albence, State Election Commissioner, replied there are currently no parameters for candidates' interactions with the public. He said, regarding minors and their interactions with candidates, no regulation has been considered in the past and the Department of Elections has not received any complaints about such interactions.

Chair Williams said the Department of Education may be able to comment on the question.

At the request of the Chair, Mark Holodick, Secretary of the Department of Education, said events related to school board elections such as debates are generally held in the evening and sponsored by school PTA organizations. He conjectured that if the bill were to pass districts may choose to enact policy prohibiting candidates from coming into schools to lobby voters.

Chair Williams said in her tenure as a school board member she was allowed to enter schools for guided tours but did not directly interact with students.

Rep. Parker Selby said she had a similar experience.

Rep. Shupe asked if schools would close on school board election day and if polling places would move out of the schools.

Mr. Albence replied that currently most polling places are in schools. If polling places need to be moved out of schools, there will have to be a change in the code.

Rep. Shupe asked if the bill necessitates a move in polling place locations.

Mr. Albence said the legislation does not speak on polling locations.

Rep. Shupe raised concern about 16- and 17-year-old individuals skewing the election as the number of them might double the number of voters in total in a district and students would already be at a polling place since it is generally located in schools. The voting power of adults in the district would be diluted.

Rep. Morrison said he does not believe all students will vote even if they have the right to do so.

Rep. Shupe disagreed with Rep. Morrison, saying students are impressionable. He said it would only take one student to go vote to make his or her friends want to vote as well.

Vice Chair Moore said only one individual voted in the last school board election in her district. She asked how the districts would handle the influx of voters.

Mr. Albence replied the DOE would work with the districts on protocol and to increase the number of polling places.

Vice Chair Moore commented that to increase knowledge about school board elections and civic engagement, an informational pamphlet could be sent home with the students.

Chair Williams said moving polling places out of schools will cause a loss in voter turnout as parents and families find it convenient to vote in the school they are dropping off or picking up their child from.

Mr. Albence said most polling places are located in schools, but the state does have non-school locations as some voters find that more convenient.

Rep. Hilovsky voiced opposition to the bill. He raised concern about young, inexperienced students impacting school or district budgets and thousands of employees.

Rep. Morrison said no other group is more affected by school board decisions than the students themselves.

Rep. Collin said young students, who do not pay taxes or own property yet, will be allowed to affect a deciding body that deals with taxes. He worried about the life inexperience of students.

Rep. Morrison emphasized that the state does not hold anyone 18 and older to standards of maturity as preconditions to vote.

Rep. Osienski said he will vote to release this bill to continue the conversation on this topic and civic engagement.

At the request of the Chair, House Attorney Mary Sherlock, replied to an earlier concern from Rep. Smith about this bill conflicting with code, saying the bill will not inadvertently allow students to vote in school referendum votes.

Rep. Romer asked about the constitutionality of this bill.

Ms. Sherlock said the Delaware Constitution only addresses general elections and does not mention any regulations about school board elections.

Chair Williams opened the floor for public comment.

Claire Snyder-Hall, Executive Director for Common Cause Delaware, expressed support for this bill. She said as a civics education teacher, she knows civic engagement is best taught through practical methods. She believes Delaware students would benefit from practicing their right to vote in school board elections.

Dr. John Marinucci said DSBA strongly opposes this bill. He expressed concerns about the legality of the bill.

Gary Steelman said he supports the bill. He stated the younger a person starts voting the longer they stay consistently active as a voter. He believed if students started voting, they could get their family members and friends to vote, increasing turnout in total.

Robert Overmiller voiced opposition to the bill.

Charito Calvachi-Mateyko, from Votamos, We Vote Coalition, voiced support for the bill. She said this bill will strengthen democracy.

Donna Austin voiced opposition to the bill. She said students may be easily manipulated by educators or others.

Rachel Goire expressed support for the bill. She said she often hears her children and their friends having engaging discussions about issues with their schools. She stated students should have a voice in decisions affecting them.

Audriana Bohm said she supports the bill. She said she is a mother of two children, and observed how being able to vote strengthened her son's engagement with politics.

Connor Brophy, from Delaware Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), voiced support for the bill. He said students should not be held to standards the state does apply to voting adults.



Nick Beard, from Delaware Now, said she supports the bill. She mentioned she works with many young women who are strong advocates for themselves and issues they care about. She believes the bill will make students more active and engaged as adults.

Jaylen Powell said she supports HB 96. She shared she ran her first school board race after high school students approached her with concerns about their district. She stated students are often told that they have an impactful place in our democracy, however they are not given many tools to exercise that power.

Ann Hedspeth, from the League of Women Voters, expressed support for the bill. She said young individuals are insightful and deserve to be empowered.

John Irwin urged the committee to support the bill. He said arguments against students voting sound similar to those used to disenfranchise minorities.

Shyanne Miller, from the Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League (MWUL), voiced support for this bill. She said 16- and 17-year-old students are the biggest stakeholders in school districts yet have no power.

Coby Owens, from the MWUL and NAACP, said it is important for individuals to get involved with voting at a young age. He expressed support for the bill.

Rev. Kathy Rionstarr, Unitarian Universalist Minister, said she supports HB 96 as it promotes democracy. She said concerns about 16- and 17-year-old students voting are concerns applicable to voting adults, such as being easily influenced or a lack of knowledge on school board elections.

A motion was made by Rep. Romer and seconded by Vice Chair Moore to table HB 96 from committee; motion carried. Yes = 13 (Chukwuocha, Collins, Hilovsky, Moore, Morrison, Osienski, Phillips, Postles, Romer, Selby, Shupe, Smith, Williams); Absent = 3 (Hensley, Lynn, Neal). The bill was tabled from committee.

Chair Williams adjourned the meeting at 5:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Sana Nangia, Legislative Fellow

## Attendance List

- Dr. Nick Conte
- Dr. John Marinucci
- Kendall Massett
- Dr. Tammy Croce
- Robert Overmiller
- Jacki Griffith
- Jenn Jankowski
- Margie López Waite
- Gloria Ho
- Taylor Hawk
- Shirin Skovronski
- Megan Williams
- Sarah Stowens
- Krissy Hall
- Kristin Dwyer
- Angela Kimble
- Linda Barnett
- Tracy Murphy
- Kirsten Olsen
- Anthony Albence
- Dr. Mark Holodick
- Mary Sherlock
- Claire Snyder-Hall
- Gary Steelman

- Charito Calvachi-Mateyko
- Donna Austin
- Rachel Goire
- Audriana Bohm
- Connor Brophy
- Nick Beard
- Jaylen Powell
- Ann Hedspeth
- John Irwin
- Shyanne Miller
- Coby Owens
- Rev. Kathy Rionstarr

Hello,

I am sending this email in regard to the HB200 Bill and imploring it will be passed. Mental health among our youth is not something that they "grow out of" as they get older. If anything, high school students need equitable access to mental health care at a greater rate due to pressures of school, social media, and the current climate of our country. It is imperative that HB200 be passed because it allows our middle and high school students to access the proper mental health services and allows for more professionals to reach students and further help them with their mental health needs.

Thank you,

*Shanice Thompson*  
*School Counselor*  
*Harlan Elementary School*  
*302-762-7156 (ext. 330)*  
[shanice.thompson@bsd.k12.de.us](mailto:shanice.thompson@bsd.k12.de.us)

I am writing in support of HB 96. I feel it would be great to get 16 year old students voting while they are still at home. It will help them become life long voters. And they should help to select the school board members that will make decisions that impact their school and their education. Certainly if students are mature enough to be responsible for driving a motor vehicle, they should be mature enough to vote for school board members.

Please move this bill to the chambers for a floor vote!

Sally Barclay

To the House Education Committee in response to HB 200 regarding An Act To Amend Title 14 Of The Delaware Code Relating To School-based Mental Health Services.

My name is Cari Miller. I am a mom of two students of the Cape Henlopen school district, one recent graduate and one currently in the 10th grade. I'm also a researcher with a deep background in algorithmic bias.

I support this bill 110%!!!

Both of my children struggle with mental health conditions. My son, who is currently enrolled in CHHS, has co-occurring conditions that have recently led to multiple in-patient stays and the need for many other mental health support resources. We've received excellent support from the Cape School district throughout his struggles. I am grateful.

I am providing public comment today to express an abundance of caution on one specific front - STUDENT DATA PRIVACY. This topic may be out of scope for this bill. However, it is not a segregable topic. FERPA does not adequately address student data privacy when it comes to mental health services provided directly by/through the school. As such, it is up to the state to enact such legislation to ensure every student's data is shielded from the known harms that arise from unprotected data in this day and age of rampant, and often unrealized, algorithmic use.

The State of Delaware lacks governance mechanisms to control the use of algorithms. There are at least 8 different school-based systems in use by the state at present that are using student data in their algorithms in ways that are questionable at best and discriminatory and harmful at worst. Mental health data is the type of data that leads to significant disparities for students, and it has a high probability of impacting underrepresented and vulnerable population students at higher rates than less vulnerable, privileged students.

I urge the state to consider a companion student health data protection bill to address this risk exposure for their residents.

I'm happy to discuss the details of this issue further, provide additional guidance and/or point you to helpful resources if desired.

Thank you for your time and all you are doing to help our struggling youth! Your work is important!!

Sincerely,  
Cari Miller

The Delaware Association of School Psychologists (DASP) supports HB 200. We believe that reducing the ratio of school psychologists, and other mental health professionals, to high school students will have a significant and positive impact on the provision of mental health services. This ratio approaches alignment to the National Association of School Psychologists' (NASP) recommended ratio of 1 school psychologist to every 500 students. Lower ratios enable school psychologists to improve utilization of the comprehensive practice model which includes implementation of a multi-tiered system of behavioral, social-emotional/mental health, developmental, and academic supports to students, fellow educators, and school systems. Lower ratios also aid in improving school psychologists' retention and in reducing burnout and stress. In addition, lower ratios allow school psychologists to invest time in prevention efforts and systems-level change; Delaware students, their families, and the schools and communities that we serve will benefit from the passing of this legislation.

Thank you,  
Nicole Garrity and Rosa DiPiazza  
DASP Government and Professional Relations (GPR) co-chairs

**Nicole W. Garrity** (she/her), **Ed.S.**, [NCSP](#)

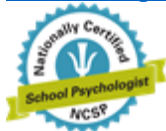
Adjunct Program Coordinator

Adjunct Associate Professor

*College of Education and Liberal Arts*

**WILMINGTON UNIVERSITY**

[nicole.w.garrity@wilmu.edu](mailto:nicole.w.garrity@wilmu.edu)



Good morning, House Education Committee members -

My name is Adriana Leela Bohm, and I live in Wilmington, DE. I have a 16-year-old daughter and a 20-year-old son. Both of my children are students, and they are in full support of HB 96. In fact, the first time my son ever voted, he voted in a school board election at Highlands Elementary School, and he has been voting ever since. My son's engagement in politics was strengthened by his ability to vote. Imagine if he could have done this at 16!

I am writing today to share why I am enthusiastic about HB 96. I have spent my entire life working with students. I have been a sociology professor for 20+ years, served on the Red Clay Consolidated School District School Board for 10 years, and have chaired various educational committees for 30+ years. In all of these capacities I have worked tirelessly to get students a seat at the table so they can (1) create policies which impact their lives and (2) weigh in and vote on policies others have developed which directly impact them. This is exactly why I support HB 96, which reduces the voting age in school board elections from 18 to 16.

HB 96 promotes civic engagement, inspires agency, builds a leadership bench amongst our youth, and presents the opportunity for a more inclusive democracy.

Please support HB 96!

Thank you.

Best regards,  
Adriana Leela Bohm, PhD  
Sociology Professor  
Delaware County Community College  
901 S. Media Line Road  
Media, PA 19063



Good afternoon, Representatives and thank you for welcoming public comment today. I am Traci Murphy, the executive director of the Delaware Coalition Against Gun Violence. We know all too well that firearms are the leading cause of death for American children and teens - and Delaware children and teens - and this alarming statistic includes death by firearm suicide. HB 200 will directly address this crisis by providing critical prevention and support programs.

In a [database of more than 150 mass shootings](#) the researcher found that about half the attackers in the sample had demonstrated signs of feeling suicidal before they hurt others. A different set of researchers who analyzed 41 school shooters for the Secret Service and Department of Education found that [78 percent had a history of thinking about or attempting suicide](#).

HB200 is an important suicide and crisis prevention tool - and will also prevent the correlating trauma experienced by classmates and communities when prevention efforts fail. When we save a life, we don't only save \*that\* life - but the lives of all the people that knew and loved that person. HB 200 IS gun violence prevention. We must support it.

Thank you!

—

**TRACI MANZA MURPHY**

*Executive Director*

[Delaware Coalition Against Gun Violence](#)

[tracimurphy@decagv.org](mailto:tracimurphy@decagv.org)

I am sure that all school counselors who agree that high school students need just as much support as any other grade level. Additional mental health services are necessary for high schools as students seek more mental health support. To believe that high school students need less help as they are reaching very stressful and pivotal points in their lives and future is quite frankly careless. Additionally, of course, COVID and the drastic change in society that has severely impacted so many families lead students to come to school with significant stressors that they developmentally and psychologically cannot cope with. The numbers are also drastically increasing for students with IEPs which are individualized educational plans that demand additional counseling support that we do not have.

School counselors help support students, but we are not trained clinically in mental health services. Our focus is short-term solution-based counseling. The traumas that students face now are beyond the scope of a school counselor. The load is already heavy, with caseloads over the recommended 250 students for school counselor ratio based on the American School Counseling Association standards. School counselors at my school are over 350 students each in caseload. School counselors are responsible for accurate academic advisement, academic records, 504 Plans, schedules, college and career readiness, college applications, scholarships, transcripts, small groups, classroom lessons, AP and SAT Exam proctoring, Data Collection, ASCA Plan development and implementation, parent/teacher conferences, and so much more. And this is if the district and /or school administrations have a proper understanding of the roles of a school counselor, as some schools do not utilize their school counselors appropriately. School counselors are the backbone of every school now; we are the right hands to administration, parents, and colleagues. The tasks that take time and need meticulous attention can get overlooked due to the overwhelming amount of work and time that also comes along with students in crisis, which can be multiple in a day.

Our students deserve the resources of additional mental health staff in the school buildings. Our students struggle daily; if their mental health is not supported, how do we expect them to achieve and succeed? Times have changed in our schools; we must as well. And we can continue to change for the better by providing the support our schools need for our students and staff.

Thank you for taking the time to listen!

Best,  
Takara Kellam M.Ed.  
School Counselor  
Serving Students (A-B)  
Dover High School  
302-241-2426 Office



"...It's necessary to recognize that we all need mercy, we all need justice, and –perhaps- we all need some measure of unmerited grace". –Bryan Stevenson

"We can't teach what we don't know, and we can't lead where we won't go." – Malcolm X

**To: House Education Committee**  
**From: Claire Snyder-Hall, Executive Director**  
**Re: HB 96: Lowering Voting Age to 16 for School Board Elections**  
**Date: April 5, 2023**

Common Cause Delaware strongly supports HB 96, a bill that would allow 16 and 17-year-old students to vote in school board elections, allowing them to help choose the adult board members who make decisions that directly affect them and their futures.

While the proposed bill might seem radical at first glance, it actually builds on currently existing Delaware law. That is to say, Delaware (along with many other states) already allows 17-year-olds to vote in primaries, if they will turn 18 by the date of the general election. And the First State (along with almost half the states) already allows 16- and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote, prior to becoming eligible to vote.

## **WHY COMMON CAUSE SUPPORTS EFFORTS TO LOWER THE VOTING AGE TO 16**

Since our founding, Common Cause has led the way for voting rights for all people because we understand that voting is the most basic and essential building block of our government. The 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which lowered the national voting age to 18 in 1971, was an initiative that Common Cause played a leading role in passing.

In 2019, Common Cause made a commitment to youth engagement because we believe it will help build a generation of lifelong participants in our democracy. Teaching 16- and 17-year-olds the importance of voting in all elections could potentially help increase voter turnout during off-year elections, which in turn will increase turnout during presidential elections. Voting is a habit and permitting 16-year-olds to vote would support habit formation among young people who are strongly connected to their local community, before they move out of their parents' home and likely begin a decade-long period of geographic mobility that contributes significantly to low voter participation among young adults. And as these engaged new voters age, voter turnout will grow with their age block. Young people can also positively influence their parents and family members who may be infrequent voters.<sup>1</sup>

In 2021, Common Cause celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which protects the right of individuals 18 years and older to vote. The U.S. Constitution does not restrict voting by people younger than 18. Some state constitutions explicitly allow municipalities to expand the right to vote in their local elections, sometimes written this way to allow women to vote in school board elections.<sup>2</sup> As constitutional law scholar Jane Rutherford has explained, youth "share the plight of women before the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment. Their numbers swell the political power of their communities [through the Census and apportionment], but that political power is not shared by them."<sup>3</sup>

Allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote will provide them with a tool to hold elected officials accountable for their actions and inaction. From school shootings to neighborhood violence to the cost of college, young people are directly and deeply impacted by public policy decisions. They have ignited social

movements on social media, but they are sometimes ignored and unable to use political power as a tool due to not being allowed to vote. Lowering the voting age could help young people achieve greater political representation and allow them to engage in advocacy efforts with the extra power of being a voter.

Common Cause advocates for a representative democracy and including 16- and 17-year-olds in the electorate will help create an electorate that represents the diversity of the United States. We need to find bold ways to continue to increase participation in democracy through voting. Lowering the voting age is one way to do this. Historically, the voices of young people, people of color, and poor people have been left out of our elections, but expanding the electorate will help to capture more of those voices.

Six jurisdictions in the United States that have already lowered the voting age to 16 for some or all elections — yielding increases in voter turnout (see below), with no discernable negative consequences. Berkeley and Oakland, California have lowered the voting age for their school board elections, which is what HB 96 is proposing for Delaware. In neighboring Maryland, Greenbelt, Hyattsville, Oakland, Riverdale, and Takoma Park have all lowered the voting age for all local elections.

## ARGUMENTS FOR LOWERING THE VOTING AGE

Voting rights and election law scholar Joshua A. Douglas notes numerous “strong policy arguments [that] favor lowering the voting age,” some of which are explained in more detail below.<sup>4</sup>

First, turning sixteen has “special significance” in our society, as that is when most states allow individuals to obtain driver’s licenses and have part-time jobs, and require them to pay taxes on their wages. Next, ... prosecutors may charge adolescents as adults if they commit crimes, but younger individuals may not participate in our democracy in a more positive way through voting. Additionally, turning eighteen ... is a volatile time in people’s lives, when they are leaving home for the workforce or college and are often mobile; sixteen-year-olds, by contrast, are more rooted in their current community, uniquely knowledgeable about local issues, and just as intellectually competent as an eighteen-year-old to select their leaders. Finally, studies show the potential for a “trickle up” effect: the younger a person begins to vote, the more likely they will sustain that habit throughout their lives.<sup>5</sup>

## Higher Voter Turnout

In 2013, the city of Takoma Park, MD, passed a charter amendment lowering the voting age for city elections to 16 “as a way to increase citizen participation in local elections.”<sup>6</sup> The amendment was inspired by a report from Denmark indicating that younger teens were more likely to vote than older teens.<sup>7</sup> Turnout among 18-24 year-olds across the United States is the lowest of all age groups.<sup>8</sup> In a 2013 Takoma Park city election, 44% of the newly enfranchised and registered young voters turned out, compared to an overall 11% turnout rate. Similarly, in a 2014 election, about half of the newly-registered 16-17 year-olds voted, compared to the 10% turnout rate of other voters.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, in 2015 the Hyattsville, MD City Council election lowered the voting age to 16.<sup>10</sup> In the city’s next election, newly registered 16- and 17-year-olds voted at a rate of 25%, which helped the city to exceed its turnout goals.<sup>11</sup>

For years, democracy advocates have lamented low voter participation among young people. According to the *New York Times*, “fewer than half of Americans 18 to 29 voted in the 2016 presidential election—a gap of more than 15 points compared with the overall turnout.”<sup>12</sup> The data above indicates that 16- and 17-year-olds would jump at the chance to vote. In doing so, young voters would begin the formation of a life-long voting habit.

## Formation of Life-Long Voting Habits

Studies show that the younger a person begins to vote the more likely they will sustain that habit throughout their lives.<sup>13</sup> By comparison to 18-year-olds, 16 and 17-year-olds are more likely to vote because they are in a more controlled or stable environment.<sup>14</sup> They are surrounded by family and a community who can encourage them to vote. Even once a young person leaves their home or stable environment, many still consider their home address to be their permanent address. It makes sense to encourage and allow a first-time voter to vote at their permanent address while they still reside there.

By comparison, 18-year-olds typically leave their family home, moving often in the years that follow for school, employment and other reasons—and facing barriers to voting as a result of frequent moves. In many communities, schools are used as voting sites and therefore not open on Election Days, so 16- and 17-year-old students would easily be able to vote while not having to juggle classes and polling site hours. The easiness of their first-time voting will have a positive effect on them voting in the future. Empowering 16- and 17-year-olds to vote now will lead to higher voter participation in all elections, especially local elections, which have abysmally low turnout.

## More Trust in Political System

Research from Austria suggests that voters aged 16 and 17 have the highest level of trust in the government.<sup>15</sup> While younger voters may share some of the same values as other voters, they have a more optimistic outlook on the government and how it works.

## OPPOSING ARGUMENTS LACK MERIT

Opponents of lowering the voting age to 16 typically argue that 16-year-olds lack the maturity, ability and motivation to participate responsibly in the electoral process.<sup>16</sup> This argument lacks merit. Political scientists studying this issue have found “there is no evidence that the quality of vote choices among citizens under 18 is any worse than that of older voters.”<sup>17</sup> Scholars have concluded that “sixteen-year-olds are mature enough — or at least as mature as individuals aged eighteen or older — to inform themselves sufficiently and make rational voting decisions.”<sup>18</sup>

Professor Vivian E. Hamilton surveyed various fields, such as behavioral and developmental psychology and social and cognitive neuroscience, to show that individuals reach an adult-like capacity to make competent decisions such as voting by age sixteen. The studies conclude that the ability of young individuals to engage in well-informed and rational decision making is highly context-specific: “adolescents reliably reach adultlike cognitive processing capacities by ages fifteen or sixteen, but . . . numerous factors (e.g., situations involving high levels of emotion or stress, peer pressure, or time pressure) will predictably compromise their cognitive performance.”

Voting, however, is not a situation that typically entails unusual emotion, stress, or even peer pressure (given the secret ballot).<sup>19</sup>

Civic engagement and knowledge are the factors most important to voting. Researchers have found that 16- and 17-year-olds “scored about the same as adults on measures of political tolerance, skill, efficacy, and interest.”<sup>20</sup> “Indeed, the average score for 16-year-olds is higher than the averages for civic knowledge for 19-, 21-, and 23-year-olds, all of whom are entitled to vote.”<sup>21</sup> This is not surprising.

Questioning one’s civic knowledge is not new. “Congress has tried to determine the amount of knowledge a potential voter might need and even then concluded in the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that a sixth-grade education provided “sufficient literacy, comprehension, and intelligence to vote in any election.”<sup>22</sup> Later on, when renewing the Act in 1975, the Senate Judiciary Committee pushed this idea further by stating, “It is difficult to see why citizens who cannot read or write should be prevented from participating in decisions that directly affect their environment.”<sup>23</sup>

By the time someone is 16 or 17 years-old, they have typically completed their state’s required civics education. 16- and 17-year-olds will be able to vote and engage in the civic process, while learning about it in the classroom. This real-world practice will allow them to understand voting and democracy in real time. Lowering the voting age increased voter turnout because it was paired with a strong civic education and outreach program for new voters. In some states such as Texas, high schools are required to make voter registration forms available to their students. In addition to the staff at high schools many community partners adopt schools and support their civic efforts by providing nonpartisan civic education materials.

It has also been argued that young adults are not mature enough to vote, as their brains are not fully developed, but psychological research has also shown that there is no discernible difference between early teens and young adults in impulsivity and self-control, and their capacities to “understand complex issues, weigh possible outcomes, and make informed decisions.”<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, for centuries vote suppressors have made claims about maturity and cognitive ability as grounds to deny the right to vote to people with disabilities, women, people of color and others. Accepting such arguments as a basis to oppose voting by 16-year-olds only compounds this troubling history.<sup>25</sup> The competency of white male adults is seldomly questioned. Adults generally do not, and should not, have to prove their competency to vote. Nor should 16-year-olds be denied the right to vote on baseless claims about competency.

## JOINING THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

A national movement to lower the voting age has already started. A small group of organizations and young people currently lead this work nationally, including Common Cause, the Campus Vote Project, Rock the Vote, Vote16USA and FairVote. Many of the young people working on lowering the voting age are high school student organizations with little or no budget.

Vote16USA is [currently recruiting](#) community organizations and young activists to work across the country on lowering the voting age. Organized by Generation Citizen, Vote16USA aims to support efforts to lower the voting age on the local level, help start new local campaigns, and elevate the issue’s prominence on a national level.

The Vote16USA campaign officially started in December 2015, with the release of the white paper “Young Voices at the Ballot Box: Advancing Efforts to Lower the Voting Age,” a comprehensive report based on extensive research and interviews with experts and stakeholders. Importantly, it included legal research to show which cities and states are primed to lower the voting age to 16. The paper has since been updated and the third edition was published in 2020.

Vote16USA is now guided by an Advisory Board and a Youth Advisory Board that aim to help with the coordination of new and current local campaigns around the country while elevating the issue nationally through traditional and social media and by building partnerships with a broad group of stakeholders. This website serves as the central hub for these efforts as we move forward.

## CONCLUSION

With all that as background, Common Cause Delaware strongly supports HB 96, a bill that would lower the voting age to 16 for school board elections.

**For Immediate Release:**

April 5, 2023

**Media contact:** Claire Snyder-Hall

[csnyder-hall@commoncause.org](mailto:csnyder-hall@commoncause.org)

302-604-1647

## **Common Cause Delaware Supports Bill to Lower Voting Age for School Board Elections**

***“This legislation will allow young people to have a voice.”***

DOVER, De. — Last week, Delaware state Representative Eric Morrison filed legislation that would change the minimum voting age to 16 for school board elections. Common Cause Delaware supports this effort and urges lawmakers to pass the bill.

“HB 96 would allow 16- and 17-year-old students to vote in school board elections, allowing them to help choose the adult board members who will make decisions that directly affect them and their futures,” said **Claire Snyder-Hall, executive director of Common Cause Delaware**. “Getting students in the habit of voting at an early age will help instill the value of civic participation in a new generation of Delaware voters. With only 42% of Delawareans voting in the 2022 election, we could benefit from greater levels of participation.”

Since its founding, Common Cause has led the way for voting rights for all people, and it continues to support legislation that protects and expands the freedom to vote.

“Over fifty years ago, Common Cause had its first victory as an organization with the passage of the 26th Amendment, which lowered the federal voting age to 18,” said **Alyssa Canty, director of youth programs at Common Cause**. “Voting is the most basic and essential building block of our government, and we’re glad to see states across the country like Delaware continuing the fight to make young voices heard.”

HB 96 does not face any constitutional issues. The 26th Amendment to the U.S. constitutions says, “The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age.” While no state may prohibit those who are 18 or older from voting, the Constitution does not preclude allowing people younger than 18 to vote.

Indeed, six jurisdictions in the United States have already lowered the voting age to 16 for some or all elections — yielding increases in voter turnout, with no discernable negative consequences. Berkeley and Oakland, California have lowered the voting age for their school board elections. In addition, several towns in Maryland have all lowered the voting age for all local elections.



In forwarding HB 96, Rep. Morrison builds on currently existing Delaware law. The First State (along with many other states) already allows 17-year-olds to vote in primaries, if they will turn 18 by the date of the general election. And Delaware (along with almost half the states) already allows 16- and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote, prior to becoming eligible to vote. Allowing youth voting in school board elections is a logical next step.

More information on the benefits of lowering the voting age is available [here](#).

The bill filed by Rep. Morrison is available here: [HB 96](#)

House Education Committee  
Delaware General Assembly  
411 Legislative Avenue  
Dover, DE 19901

April 26, 2023

Dear Rep. Williams and the House Education Committee:

College Board would like to offer its support of HB 116 “An Act to Amend Title 14 of the Delaware Code Relating to Advanced Placement Examinations.” Enacting a comprehensive statewide credit policy for students who score a 3 or above on Advanced Placement Exams will help Delaware students receive the credit they earned for their success in rigorous coursework.

For more than 60 years, the College Board’s Advanced Placement (AP) Program has collaborated with high schools, colleges, and universities to prepare students for success in higher education. AP provides motivated and academically prepared students with a challenging curriculum developed, approved, and evaluated by college and university faculty.

The opportunity to earn college credit during high school is a key benefit for students who take AP courses and exams. More than 1,600 Delaware graduates in the class of 2022 earned a score of 3 or above on an AP Exam during their high school career. If these students were all awarded credit for their scores, the potential tuition and fee savings for Delaware students and families is nearly \$10 million.<sup>1</sup>

Most 4-year colleges and universities in the United States—as well as many institutions in more than 65 other countries—grant credit, advanced placement, or both for qualifying AP Exam scores. Thirty-six states have implemented statewide or systemwide AP credit policies, which typically require all public higher education institutions to award credit for AP Exam scores of 3 or higher, including neighboring states such as Maryland and Pennsylvania.

This means students can save time and money and get a head start on their education when they enter college with the credit they deserve through AP. Research has long shown the benefits of taking and succeeding on AP Exams, including higher first-year college GPAs and on-time four-year college graduation.

Unfortunately, Delaware higher education institutions are not awarding AP credits to all students due to inconsistent credit granting policies. As a result, some Delaware students who earned successful scores

---

<sup>1</sup> This report assumes a student earns three college credits for a qualifying score of 3, 4, or 5. Average 2022-23 in-state tuition and fees at public four-year institutions in Delaware are based on Figure CP-6 of Trends in College Pricing and Student Aid 2022.

are losing out on earned college credit, and then must pay to retake a similar campus-based course. Delaware should take steps to remove roadblocks for students' path towards a degree.

Thank you for your continued partnership. We look forward to further discussing how we can support students, families, and educators across Delaware.

Todd Iverson  
Director, Government Relations

Dr. David Redlawsk  
4 Fall Brooke Rd.  
Newark, DE  
May 1, 2023

House Education Committee  
Delaware General Assembly  
Dover, DE

Dear Honorable Members of the House Education Committee:

I am Dr. David Redlawsk, James R. Soles Professor and Chair of the Department of Political Science at the University of Delaware. I am writing as a Delaware citizen and long-time voter decision-making researcher. As a political psychologist my research has been published in numerous journal articles and books since 1997.

I am writing in support of HB 96 to lower the voting age to 16 in Delaware School Board elections. My research on how voters use of information to inform their votes and the cognitive and emotional processes involved in voter decision making suggests 16 and 17 year olds can be just as able as older voters to make decisions about issues that impact them. Turning 18 is not a magical cut off age at which the capacity to make candidate choices is suddenly there when it was missing the day before. School Board elections are a particularly appropriate opportunity to begin engaging in the democratic practices that sustain our society. A defining characteristic of most people 16 to 17 years old is that they are still in school. Thus, decisions made by school boards have very direct and immediate impact on their education, and it makes sense for them to have a voice. I am comfortable that these young people are capable of learning about candidates and processing the information provided by campaigns and others. And it may well be that in some ways they may be more motivated than most to participate.

In addition to my research, I have been engaged for a number of years with an organization called the Mikva Challenge. Based in Chicago, and operating in a number of cities (including Wilmington), Mikva's driving force is student voice. I have had the privilege of listening to young people give well-researched talks on issues about which they care deeply during Mikva's Project Soapbox. What I have taken away from this is that these students are ready to engage in democracy, and should be given the opportunity to do so in a meaningful way. As the Mikva Challenge motto says, "Democracy is a Verb!" My research and experience leads me to strongly support HB 96 and to respectfully ask you to do so as well.

Sincerely,

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

David P. Redlawsk, Ph.D.



May 2, 2023

Members of the House Education Committee,

The [Delaware Voting Rights Coalition](#), the first statewide coalition of voting rights organizations and advocates comprised of 40 organizations and numerous individuals, urges you to vote YES on HB 96, which would allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in school board elections.

Students are uniquely qualified to weigh in on school board elections, given they have the most direct experience with the impact of policy and budget decisions as they've spent their entire childhoods inside of those schools. They have firsthand knowledge of what is working well and what needs improvement and have a vested interest in making sure their schools remain strong.

This bill will instill the value of civic responsibility in a new generation of Delaware voters by empowering young people to develop the habit of voting at an early age. Like a learner's permit, this bill introduces students to the voting process in a local, nonpartisan election – a teachable moment done with the support of teachers and parents.

HB 96 builds on currently existing Delaware law. The First State, as well as many other states, already allows 17-year-olds to vote in primary elections if they will turn 18 by the date of the general election. Moreover, Delaware already allows 16- and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote prior to becoming eligible to vote, as do almost half of all states. Allowing young people to vote in school board elections is a logical next step.

There are numerous reasons why it makes sense to let 16-year-olds vote. First, studies show that 16-year-olds are just as capable as 18-year-olds when it comes to choosing between two candidates in an election. Second, the 16th year is generally far less tumultuous than the 18th, when young people are focused on major life changes like beginning college or joining the workforce. Permitting 16-year-olds to vote would support habit formation among young people who are strongly connected to their local community before they move out of their parents' home and likely begin a decade-long period of geographic mobility that contributes significantly to low voter participation among young adults.

Society already recognizes the 16th year as a point of maturity. At 16, young people can start working without a permit and obtain a driver's license. Working 16- and 17-year-olds pay taxes on their earnings. They are also old enough to petition the Court for emancipation.

If Delaware's goal is encouraging voters to participate in upholding the cornerstone of our democracy, then HB 96 is a step in the right direction.

The Delaware Voting Rights Coalition encourages you to vote yes on HB 96 and allow Delaware House members to have a full debate on the merits of the bill.

Sincerely,

The Delaware Voting Rights Coalition