



ASSEMBLY MEMBER

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DISTRICT 22

## ACA 4 – Primary Voting for 17 year-olds



### **PURPOSE**

ACA 4 would authorize a United States citizen who is 17 years of age, is a resident of this State, and will be at least 18 years of age at the time of the next general election to register to vote and to vote in any intervening primary or special election that occurs after the person registers to vote.

### **EXISTING LAW**

Article II Section 2 of California Constitution authorizes any person who is a United States citizen at least 18 years of age and a resident of the state to vote.

### **BACKGROUND & PROBLEM**

Voter turnout for primary elections is consistently lower than observed voter turnout levels for general elections. According to the Secretary of State's office, 50.45% of eligible voters in California participated in the 2018 general election while only 28.43% of eligible voters participated in the 2018 primary election. Participation of eligible voters for the 2016 general and primary elections in California were slightly higher at 58.74% and 34.49% respectively, yet turnout statistics for presidential election years are consistently higher.

Amongst various age demographics of eligible voters, the young adult population has a staggering minimal voter turnout rate in comparison to other age groups. According to research conducted by the California Civic Engagement Project, while the overall turnout for eligible voters was approximately 50%, the turnout for eligible youth voters was much less at 27.5% for the 2018 general election in California. The registration rate for youth voters during the 2018 general election was also much smaller with 61.6% of youth eligible voters registered and 78.9% of the entire population of eligible voters registered. For the purposes of the data, as well as a significant

amount of other research conducted in the election space, youth voters are confined to individuals between the ages of 18 and 24.

### **SOLUTION**

ACA 4 will allow individuals who are 17 years of age who will be 18 years of age by the general election to register to vote and to vote in primary and special elections that occur after the individual registers to vote. This measure will amplify the voices of young voters in California by allowing more first-time voters to take part in the full election cycle rather than just the general election. This important change will result in a more inclusive election process in California, ensuring that first-time voters have the opportunity to select candidates that will ultimately appear on the November ballot.

This would also create an opportunity to increase voter turnout among youth voters. Allowing 17-year-olds to register and participate in primary elections would complement the civic education many receive in high school. Research indicates that voting is habit-forming. Early involvement in the electoral process for first-time voters should be a high priority for this reason.

### **NATIONAL TREND**

Many states across the nation allow some form of primary voting for individuals that are 17 years of age. According to FairVote, there are 23 states as well as the District of Columbia that allow 17-year-olds to vote in presidential primaries or caucuses. 16 states as well as the District of Columbia allow 17 year-olds to vote in congressional primaries or caucuses.

### **STAFF CONTACT**

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