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March 25, 2013

Mayor Bruce Williams and Members of the City Council  
7500 Maple Avenue  
Takoma Park, MD 20912

Dear Mayor Williams and members of the Council;

The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement at Tufts University (CIRCLE) is a nationally recognized, non-partisan research organization that studies youth voting, youth civic and political participation and civic education.

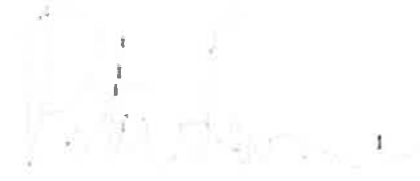
**CIRCLE supports Mayor Bruce Williams' effort to allow 16 and 17 year-olds to vote in municipal elections in Takoma Park** for several research-based reasons.

- 16 and 17-year-olds are *not too young to vote*. A study found that **16-year-olds' political knowledge is about the same as 21-year-olds'** and quite close to the average for all adults.<sup>1</sup>
- Research shows that **voting is habitual**, so promoting the turnout of 16 and 17-year-olds should increase participation for decades to come.<sup>2</sup>
- **Norms related to political participation in high school have a lasting impact** – high school students continue to have higher turnout rate, by seven percentage points, even in their mid- thirties, if they went to schools where a majority of students believe they should vote. Therefore, if you provide high school students to vote, they will.<sup>3</sup>
- Just getting high school students to preregister while they are in school has a positive effect on voting behaviors after they turn 18. **Being able to actually vote while they are still in high school should positively affect voting.**<sup>4</sup>
- Our analysis (not yet published) of our own national youth survey conducted after the 2012 election finds that **learning about voting in high school predicts actual voting once people reach age 18**. If students were eligible to vote while they were still in school, then teaching about voting would be more effective and more frequent.

Not only do we know that allowing 16 and 17-year-olds to vote has a lasting, positive impact on political participation, we also know from research that young people often have distinct values, and therefore political voices, which is crucial for healthy

democratic governance. We strongly believe that if 16 and 17-year-olds have a distinct political voice and are capable of voting, they should be allowed to do so. We sincerely hope that you will support this important bill. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Peter Levine, Ph.D.  
Director, CIRCLE



Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, Ph.D.  
Lead Researcher, CIRCLE

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Hart and Robert Atkins, "American Sixteen- and Seventeen-Year-Olds are Ready to Vote," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 63 (January 2011), pp. 201-221.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Plutzer, "Becoming a Habitual Voter: Inertia, Resources, and Growth," *The American Political Science Review* 96/1 (March 2002), pp. 41-56.

<sup>3</sup> David Campbell, "Vote early, vote often: The role of schools in creating civic norms," *Education Next*, 5/3 (2005), pp. 62-69.

<sup>4</sup> Michael McDonald and Matthew Thornburg, "Registering the youth through voter preregistration," *New York University Journal of Legislation and Public Policy*, 13/33 (2010), pp. 551-572.