

1 [Urging State Legislators to Permit Persons 16 Years of Age or Older to Vote in City or
2 County Elections.]

3 **Resolution urging the California Legislature to pass a bill that will allow local choice**
4 **legislation, for which any city or county could permit persons 16 years or older to vote**
5 **in city or county elections.**

6

7 WHEREAS, An estimated 9.7 billion dollars is paid by teenagers in sales taxes alone
8 every year, as well as millions of dollars in income taxes. Youth pay billions in taxes to state,
9 local, and federal governments, yet they have no say over how much is taken. This is taxation
10 without representation; and

11 WHEREAS, Elected officials represent various constituencies; currently, young people
12 are no one's constituency. If youth had a vote and the opportunity to represent themselves
13 and take part in the democratic process, legislators would be more willing to engage with
14 youth voters and represent their wants and needs; and

15 WHEREAS, Voters cast their ballots based on their individual circumstances, and
16 when those circumstances change, often their voting habits do as well. The concerns of a 16-
17 year-old are different from those of a 26-year-old, just as the concerns of a poor person differ
18 from those of a rich person. The beliefs and priorities of 16-year-olds as a class are unique;
19 we cannot expect former 16-year-olds to have as accurate a perspective as those who are
20 currently that age; and

21 WHEREAS, If youth were to be given the vote, not only would their personal voter
22 turnout increase for the remainder of the young voters' lives, the turnout of their parents
23 would increase as well. A program called Kids Voting USA started in the mid- to late-1990s
24 allowed young children to go and vote at polling stations where their parents voted. A 1996
25 survey by Bruce Merrill, an Arizona State University journalism professor, found a strong

1 increase in voting turnout. Merrill compared turnout of registered voters in five cities with Kids
2 Voting with turnout in five cities without the program. Merrill found that between five and ten
3 percent of respondents reported Kids Voting was a factor in their decision to vote. This
4 indicated that 600,000 adults nationwide were encouraged to vote by the program; and

5 WHEREAS, The argument that youth should not vote because they lack the ability to
6 make informed and intelligent decisions is valid only if that standard is applied to all citizens.
7 Yet this standard is not applied to all citizens, only young people. We do not deprive a senile
8 person of this right, nor do we deprive any of the millions of alcoholics, neurotics, psychotics
9 and assorted fanatics who live outside of hospitals of it. We seldom ever prevent those who
10 are hospitalized for mental illness from voting; and

11 WHEREAS, In 1971, the 26th Amendment to the Constitution was passed by
12 Congress. The reason that Congress passed this amendment was because 18- and 20-year-
13 olds were being sent to war, though they didn't even have the right to vote. This is still true:
14 leaders who youth can't vote for today may send them to war tomorrow; and

15 WHEREAS, Youth are subject to adult penalties in the criminal justice system, despite
16 lacking the basic right to vote. In Colorado, defendants under the maximum age for juvenile
17 court jurisdiction may nonetheless be charged by direct filing in criminal court if they are over
18 14 years of age and are charged with one of a legislative list of violent crimes. This is a
19 double standard -- youth are judged as adults responsible for their own actions in court, but
20 are alienated from their own politics when they want to vote; and

21 WHEREAS, With the voting age at 16 there is the opportunity for new voters to be
22 more educated. If the voting age is lowered, schools may schedule a high school class that
23 will introduce the issues and prepare new voters. It stands to reason that these young voters
24 will be as well prepared to vote as their elders; and

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1 WHEREAS, Many believe that voting is more likely to become a habit if it is allowed to
2 begin earlier. In Baltimore, Maryland, because of the scheduling of a local primary election
3 and a requirement that everyone eligible to vote in a general election be allowed to vote in its
4 primary, 16- and 17-year-olds in that city did get to vote on September 9, 2003. There was
5 press coverage, but no “get out the vote” drive directed at the young voters. Of residents who
6 were over 18, 36% voted. The voting percentage of those 16 or 17 was 35%, nearly identical;
7 and

8 WHEREAS, Teenagers have achieved amazingly high levels of volunteering and
9 community service. However currently, many feel turned off by politics. Small gestures like
10 mock voting have had a large, positive affect on the teens’ interest in politics in the past. Of
11 students participating in Kids Voting USA, “. . . More than 71% of students reported frequently
12 or occasionally questioning parents about elections at home. The same students also viewed
13 voting with great importance. About 94% felt it was very important or somewhat important to
14 vote.” Including youth in a real, substantive way in politics will lead to even more interest as
15 they take their public-spirited nature into the political realm; and

16 WHEREAS, When SCA 19 was introduced by former State Senator John
17 Vasconcellos, it was passed by two committees; and

18 WHEREAS, There are many prominent individuals who have already gone on record
19 as supporting voting rights for people younger than 18. A few of them are: California former
20 State Senator John Vasconcellos, California State Senator Edward Vincent, California State
21 Assemblywomen Carol Liu and Sarah Reyes, Physicist Robert Fuller (Ph.D. Princeton, 1959),
22 Alaskan State Assemblyman Allan Tesche, Arizona State Representative Carmine
23 Cardamone, Hawaii State Representative Takai Arakaki, Maine State Representative Glenn
24 Cummings, Baltimore City Council President Sheila Dixon, Michigan State Representative
25 Douglas Hart, Minnesota State Representative Steve Kelley (Majority Whip of the State

1 House), Texas State Representative Ron Wilson, and Great Britain Prime Minister Tony Blair;
2 now, therefore be it

3 RESOLVED, That the San Francisco Board of Supervisors urges the California
4 Legislature to pass a bill that will allow local choice legislation, for which any city or county
5 could permit persons 16 years of age or older to vote in city or county elections; and be it

6 FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors direct the Clerk of the Board to
7 send copies of this resolution, upon passage, to California Assembly and Senate and the
8 Governor of California.

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