



Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens (GACEC)
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MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 28, 2023

TO: **The Honorable Representative Eric Morrison and Senator Sarah McBride, Sponsors**
The Honorable Senators Hoffner, Lockman, Pinkney and Representatives Baumbach, Lambert and Wilson-Anton, Co-Sponsors

FROM: **Ann C. Fisher, Chairperson**
GACEC

RE: **House Bill No. 96 Lowering the Eligible Age to Vote in School Board Races**

The Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens (GACEC) has reviewed House Bill No. 96, which would change the minimum voting age from 18 to 16 for school board elections (but not for referendums). Council would like to see greater involvement by our young people but is **unable to support** this legislation. Proponents of the bill state these young people are directly affected by board decisions and therefore should have a say in who makes decisions about schools. Council agrees with bill sponsor, Rep. Eric Morrison, that getting students more involved in civic life is beneficial. However, while we agree that we would like young people to be more engaged in district governance, there is concern that 16 year old individuals could be manipulated into casting their votes a certain way in a manner that could exploit their limited understanding of issues. A cursory review of Delaware Code suggests that this change would also permit 16 year olds to run for school board seats. Council noted that the State Board of Education has a slot for a high school junior or senior but theirs is a non-voting position. There is nothing in the legislation to indicate that there are safeguards in place to protect the integrity of younger voters or prevent individuals at age 16 from running for school board seats. School board members have a tremendous responsibility to the students in the district they represent. While we value the perspective of our young people and would like to see them become more involved in decision-making overall, we do not believe that this is the best method to improve that involvement. We would like the opportunity to meet with the sponsors of this legislation to discuss our concerns and the intent of the bill. Perhaps a discussion could point out that there are safeguards in place that are not clear to us.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our concerns with the proposed legislation and our request for additional information. Please feel free to contact me or Pam Weir at the GACEC office should you have any questions.