

Submission to the Justice Select Committee

In support of lowering the voting age



New Zealand Council Of
Christian Social Services

Contact Name:	Nikki Hurst
Organisation Name:	New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS)
Organisation description:	<p>The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Supreme Courts Declaration of Inconsistency, and in support of lowering the voting age.</p> <p>NZCCSS has six foundation members; the Anglican Care Network, Baptist Churches of New Zealand, Catholic Social Services, Presbyterian Support and the Methodist and Salvation Army Churches.</p> <p>Through this membership, NZCCSS represents over 250 organisations providing a range of social support services across Aotearoa. We believe in working to achieve a just and compassionate society for all, through our commitment to our faith and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Further details on NZCCSS can be found on our website www.nzccss.org.nz.</p>

Tirohanga Whānui | Overview

We support lowering the voting age to widen franchise in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Taunakitanga | Recommendations

Our main points are:

Item One – Lower the voting age

We agree with the Supreme Court’s Declaration that the voting age is inconsistent with the human rights of 16 and 17 year-olds.

NZCCSS advocates for increased access to voting for young people in our communities. We strongly believe that the voting age should be lowered to 16 to enable youth engagement in the democratic processes that affect their lives and will be in place as they reach legal adulthood at 18.

NZCCSS members work with young people and their families in a variety of settings and advocate for the rights of young people to be upheld. We observe that 16-year-olds already participate in society through a range of decisions and responsibilities (including leaving home, exiting education, being employed, holding a drivers’ or firearms license). They demonstrate interest and engagement in

issues relating to legislation, policy and their communities, evidenced through participation in advocacy and volunteering.

Efforts to enable youth voice in Parliamentary or other government processes tend to be inconsistent in their approach and limited to just that – voice. They do not translate to enabling action in the form of voting:

“Our parliament has told us they recognise we care about our communities. They’ve told us we can give speeches on the importance of voting. They’ve told us we’re more than capable of discussing and debating complex issues, and our MPs have told us we should support their party policy...

...The only thing not ‘real’ about Youth Parliament is that many of us will not have the right to vote in this year’s local election, or even next year’s general election. We’re part of thousands of young people who are told we are not smart enough or informed enough to vote.” (Cate Tipler in Fa’aoso, 2022)

Further, research in relation to lowering the voting age overwhelmingly supports this kaupapa. In 2021 researchers from the Universities of Montana and California collated existing evidence affirming the many positive reasons to lower the voting age and providing evidence challenging common misconceptions (Oosterhoff, Wray-Lake and Hart, 2021¹). This article is simply the most recent collation of evidence, shared by experts that have asserted their findings for well over twenty years. Many of the articles listed in the reference list would similarly be worth exploring and strengthen the point that lowering the voting age is overwhelmingly positive – and we have known this for a substantial amount of time.

Restricting the ability for young people to vote limits the rights of young people, and contradicts a full expression of both Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Article 3 of Te Tiriti confers the rights of citizenship to all Māori. There is no clear limitation on age. Article 1 affords Rangatiratanga, again with no limitation of age.

We strongly support the voting age being lowered to 16 years to welcome and encourage youth participation and perspective into the decisions being made about their lives today and for the future.

Recommendation Proposal 1: Extend franchise to include those aged 16 years of age, 3 months prior to any national or local elections.

Item Two – National elections

There is sufficient time to address this issue before the house rises for the 2023 national election.

Recommendation Proposal 2: Introduce and pass a Bill enacting a lowering of the voting age for national elections before the 54th Parliament ends.

Item Three – Local Body Elections

There is sufficient time to address this issue before the house rises for the 2023 national election.

¹ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1745691621994221>

Recommendation Proposal 3: Introduce and pass a Bill enacting a lowering of the voting age for local body elections before the 54th Parliament ends.

Item Four – No need for a referendum

Referendums are costly, and non-binding. Holding a referendum that would specifically exclude the voices of those it would most impact is farcical.

Recommendation Proposal 4: Do not hold a referendum on this issue.