

HB 277 Allow person under 18 to vote in primary
House State Administration, RM 455
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Secretary Linda McCulloch Testimony

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HB 277

Good morning Mr. Chair, members of the committee.
For the record, I am Montana Secretary of State Linda McCulloch.

I am here today to support House Bill 277, an act allowing a 17-year-old to vote in a primary providing that the person will be 18-years-old on or before the general election.

One way to ensure Montana elections accurately reflect the will of the people, is to make voting accessible to a greater number of Montanans.

As the chief election official, I am committed to continuing Montana's remarkable tradition of consistently having one of the highest voter turnout rates in the nation.

Eighteen states agree that allowing 17-year-olds to vote in a primary further encourages our youngest voter population to become actively involved in the election process.

In the 2008 general election, 18-24 year-olds represented nearly 10% of the total registered electors in Montana. More than 60% of these registered electors successfully filled in their ballots, contributing to the largest voter turnout in the nation since 1968.

Research suggests that voting in a preceding election may increase the probability of voting in the next election by as much as 47%.

In other words, "Once a voter, always a voter." There is no denying that the majority of our habits form when we are young.

Increasing youth engagement in the elections process is another step in the right direction to maintaining fair, honest and accurate elections in the state of Montana.

Thank you for your time.