

A New Tool for Youth Empowerment: Voter Preregistration & Education

Overview: The provisions of H-908 do not change the voting age but (a) allow 16 and 17 year olds to preregister to vote, (b) encourage instruction during the civics course about the importance of registration and voting, and (c) requires local boards of elections to assist registration / preregistration in schools. Most students are 16 when they take civics in high school and go to the DMV for a driver's license, so it's the ideal time to sign them up as future voters.

Verification Process: People who preregister must still have their information verified – in the same way, and at the same time, as the normal process for a newly registered voter. *See Point 3 in “How It Works,” on next column*

Bipartisan Support: The bill passed the NC House 102 to 14. It had four main sponsors, two Democrats and two Republicans, including the two youngest members of the NC House.

Preregistration Helps Civics Education: Students are required to take Civics & Economics in NC (generally in the 10th grade, at age 16) to “acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to become responsible and effective citizens in an interdependent world.” Preregistration provides a relevant and practical context for teaching civics.

Basic Facts

- Registration among youth is much lower than for other age groups. While only about 10% of citizens over 40 are not registered, nearly one third of those 18 to 25 are not registered.
- The DMV generates more voter registration applications than any other method in NC. Data from DMV forms is more legible than on many other applications.
- 16 and 17 year olds change addresses less often than those 18 and 19 (source: DMV).
- Studies show that voting, like good driving

skills, is habit-forming. Early experience with the process of voting increases the chances of life-time participation.

- Some county elections boards have outreach programs in high schools but current law only requires boards to provide blank forms.
- Preregistration helps develop accurate, more comprehensive voter registration rolls and will shorten Same-Day Registration lines.
- A new law for preregistration in Florida is helping add more youth to the voter rolls.

How It Works

1. The basic voter registration form would be used, with a new box explaining the pre-registration option for 16 and 17-year-olds.
2. The forms will be sent electronically by the DMV and county elections boards to the State Board of Elections to hold until the time for the verification process (*see next*).
3. When *preregistered* teenagers become old enough to *register*, they'll be automatically registered to vote by the Board of Elections and the normal verification process for all new registered voters will take place *at that time*, including verification of the ID number and residential address. *See Section 7 of H-908*, which says the teenager “shall be automatically registered upon reaching the age of eligibility following verification of the person's qualifications and address in accordance with G.S. 163-82.7.”
4. The State Board of Elections says it can develop software for the preregistration of 16 and 17 year olds with its existing budget.
5. The State Board says preregistration can work and improve the registration files. The NC associations of principals, school boards, and educators have also approved the bill.

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