Amos Washington
2018 Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations

13 December 2018

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary,

Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Lowering Voting Age and Increasing Voter Participation) Bill 2018

I am the 2018 Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations, and provide this submission in my personal capacity.

As part of my role, I undertook a six-month listening tour, running 152 consultations with thousands of young Australians across the country in rural and urban areas. In consultations, I sought an answer to the question, *what would Australia look like if young people had a greater say?*

The 2018 Youth Representative Consultation Report[1], tabled in the House of Representatives on 4 December, summarises my findings for the year. This year, I found that young people are passionate, engaged members of society, who deserve a seat at the policy decision-making table.

The report found that 84.6% of young people are interested in current events outside Australia, 78.8% are interested in learning more about the United Nations, and 77.8% are interested in learning about how the government makes decisions. However, less than one in five young people felt as though their opinions are represented by politicians in government.

The consultation report provides eight recommendations that aim to amplify the perspectives of young Australians. One of these is the lowering of the voting age to 16.

Young people are key stakeholders in our society. They are not merely future participants in Australia; they are fully-fledged members of society now. Young people can make important contributions to policy, and are wholly capable and deserving of full political participation.

A lowering of the voting age should be paired with a renewed focus on civics education in schools, to ensure that all 16 and 17-year-olds are equipped with the right knowledge about our electoral system.

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[1] Washington, A & UN Youth Australia 2018, '2018 Youth Representative Consultation Report,' *UN Youth Australia,* unyouth.org.au/youthrep.

It's time to allow 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote.

Yours faithfully,

Amos Washington