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'Make it 16' campaign launches, taking case of voting rights of 16-year-olds to court

Felix Desmarais · 19:04, Sep 19 2019



MONIQUE FORD/STUFF

The 'Make It 16' campaign will be launched at Parliament tomorrow. Co directors Dan Harward Jones, 17, front left and Gina Dao-McLay 16, front right, are pictured with, from left, Jackson Graham, 20, Lily Stelling, 18, Rebecca Matijevich, 19, Ella Flavell, 18, Pierson Palmer, 17, and Olivia Trass, 17.

At 16, you can leave school, leave home, work fulltime, apply for a gun licence and fly a plane solo. So why can't you vote?

The campaign, named "Make it 16" will launch at Parliament on Friday, with plans to take their case to the High Court, testing the rights of 16 and 17-year-olds to be able to vote in elections.



MONIQUE FORD/STUFF

Make it 16 Campaign co-director Gina Dao-McLay, 16, says politicians are blocking the voices of 16 and 17 year olds.

Campaign co-director Gina Dao-McLay, 16, said politicians were blocking the voices of 16 and 17-year-olds even though they could work fulltime, consent to sex, drive a car and own guns.

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"If a person is over 16 then it is unlawful for any businesses or organisations to discriminate against them based on their age.

CHRISTEL YARDLEY/STUFF

Children's Commissioner Judge Andrew Becroft supports the idea of lowering the voting age to 16.

"Politicians ... are allowing discriminatory laws to stay in place and we are going to challenge that through the court system."

The campaign will argue the current voting age of 18 was "unjustified age discrimination" and that the High Court should declare it inconsistent with the Bill of Rights Act.

The Friday evening launch will be the start of a "nationwide campaign", with supportive MPs, Wellington local body candidate Tamatha Paul, and Children's Commissioner Judge Andrew Becroft expected to speak.

KEVIN STENT/STUFF

National Party youth spokesperson Nicola Willis says 18 is the "widely accepted" age of adulthood, and opposes lowering the voting age.

Becroft said lowering the voting age would enhance turnout, ingrain the habit of voting and uphold young people's rights.

"Children and young people have the right to have their voices heard and taken into account."

The need for better civics education went hand-in-hand.

"It should be combined with lowering the voting age, so that students learning about opportunities for civic engagement at school have the opportunity to immediately put what they have learned into practice.

"If young people have the opportunity to vote for the first time while they are at school, they are more likely to continue to build on this civic engagement in the future."

It was time for New Zealand to take youth participation seriously, he said.

However, there was not unanimous support for the movement.

"Voting is a wonderful responsibility and it's a rite of passage but I think we've got it about right having it at 18."

She recognised there were many under 18s that were "too young to vote, but not too young to engage".

"A vote is not the only way to use their political voice."

OVERSEAS EXPERIENCE

There are at least 16 places in the world where 16-year-olds can vote.

* In Argentina and Brazil, it is optional to vote at 16, 17 or over 70. Between 18 and 70, it is compulsory.

* In Bosnia and Herzegovina, you can vote at 16 if you are employed.

* In the UK, Scottish 16 year olds could vote in the referendum on Scottish independence. In Scotland, the voting age is 16.

* The voting age is 17 in Timor Leste, Ethiopia, Greece, Indonesia, South Sudan and Sudan. In Norway 17 year olds can vote in elections if they are turning 18 that year, and in the US, 17 year olds can vote in presidential primaries as long as they will turn 18 on or before the general election.

Other places where the voting age is 16:

* Austria

* Cuba

* Ecuador

* Estonia (for local elections)

* Malta

* Nicaragua

SWEET 16

At 16, you can:

* Leave home

* Leave school

* Work fulltime (if you have left school)

