

Williams student spearheads campaign to lower voting age



By Brock Weir

If you can file your taxes at the tender age of 15, surely you should have a say in how the government spends it and cast your vote, according to Aurora's Ben Williamson.

Ben, a 16-year-old student at Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School is spearheading an online petition to encourage the Government to lower the voting age to 16.

Launched during the heat of last year's Federal Election, Ben says he hopes the petition will gain traction and spur change.

It is interesting to me that a 15-year-old can file their income tax and be charged for the most severe crimes, and you can even drop out of school at 16, but when it comes to the biggest decision in Canada's democracy, you can't vote, says Ben. We can drive a car, we can file income tax, be charged as an adult in criminal court for the most severe crimes. We're seen as adults in that sense, but we're seen as childish when it comes to voting. That doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

18-year-olds were voting [in the last election] and some of them were acting as childish, if not more childish, than the 16-year-olds that I know.

But therein lies the issue: how can you make sure that people as young as 16 will take the vote seriously?

That is one of the biggest challenges Ben says he has encountered on his mission.

Some of the arguments that have been raised to me are the youth just do not vote and the voting age isn't going to make a difference, or we are not mature enough, we're not ready, we just don't know, or we're too childish, he says. To that I would say it is time that we are seen as active, valued members of Canadian society.

Recently, Scotland took a stand in this regard giving 17-year-olds the right to vote in their referendum on whether or not the country should leave the United Kingdom and that brought out some interesting results that could have an impact in Canada, says Williamson.

I think political parties would have to gear their platforms more to the younger generation because I think one of the common arguments among youth is people our age don't care because the time they reach 18, what have [the politicians] done for them? We

are the next generation in politics and we need to make sure the decisions that are being made are the right ones because Parliament makes decisions for the future of Canada and it is us that will take the torch when we're the ones who run for public office.

?We want to make sure Canada is the country we would like to see.?

To view Williamson's petition, visit: chn.ge/1O6Pdt0