

My name is Taylor Gunn and I am the founding President of CIVIX.

I have spent the last 12 years working with students, teachers, schools, governments and election agencies to encourage youth democratic participation.

My organization CIVIX primarily provides experiential civic education programming for elementary and secondary school students. Our rationale is that the best way for a young person to learn about their democracy is to experience it rather than read about it in a textbook.

Our farthest reaching and longest-running program is called Student Vote. It is a parallel election for students under the voting age. Many of you have participated in it. Basically, it helps schools put democracy on the curriculum throughout the course of an election campaign. Kids go home and they engage their parents in the election, they meet the official election candidates, they run the vote in the school for their peers and they vote on the official election candidates.

In the last federal election it was the second time we had over half a million students from just under four thousand schools across the country.

The cost of the program, in partnership with Elections Canada was approximately \$750,000. That equates to about \$1.32 per student.

We now offer other programs between elections because we know that being a citizen means more than just casting a ballot at election time.

You might have heard about the Student Budget Consultation that we coordinated with Finance Minister Flaherty and the opposition party leaders, including Ms. May. Thank you. It was all about getting kids to understand the federal budget.

And then we recently launched something this school year called Rep Day, which many of you have taken part in as well. We're trying to help you get face time with your local high school students to break down their occasionally negative stereotypes of politicians and the political process.

I'm here with you today because I want to work with you on this Act.

We've enjoyed the privilege of working with Elections Canada over the past four federal elections through Section 18. This draft now of the Fair Elections Act would disempower Elections Canada from supporting us working in schools across the country.

This is very important to me because in 2015 we think it's possible to be in half of all schools in this country and increase our numbers significantly. I don't feel that I can do that without the support of Elections Canada.

We've got two short recommendations for you. But I first wanted to touch on something that is very important to us. To get into schools, the authenticity and credibility of being in partnership with Elections Canada is critical to be welcomed into schools.

It is an irreplaceable badge of honour. Everyone knows Elections Canada is our electoral agency and it can't be replaced with support from say a Fraser Institute or a Tides Canada Foundation or another group, for example. For us it is critical that we maintain that relationship.

We have two recommendations. The first, it may be obvious for us, is we've enjoyed working under Section 18. It has allowed us to come to them with new ideas. Obviously it is up to interpretation what they decide to support or involve in. And maybe you'd like to narrow that, but our first recommendation would be to keep Section 18 as it is and reserve the time of the committee to focus on some of the other major issues like vouching, et cetera.

Our second one, and you can look at the last page of the booklet we gave you with the new Section 18. The sidebar says "Communication with Electors." What we do is we teach the when, where and how to vote. If that could be changed (it's not even in the bill, it's just describing what the section is) to "Communication with Canadians," I think that would allow us to have permission to teach the when, where and how to vote with the support of Elections Canada to non-electors, those being under the voting age.

Outside of that I would like to say thanks for the opportunity to have four and a half minutes and I'd just like to point out that, in our opinion, the most significant and important actors in our democracy right now are teachers and our schools. Schools play such an important and integral role in civic education. They don't need a whole curriculum around social studies or how to be a citizen. They just need great teachers that care about this. They can bring these opportunities into the curriculum and I hope that you'll help us continue to do that.