

**The Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP**

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

Via email

Dear Steve Reed MP,

**Give young people a say in their future. Scrap Clause 2 of the Representation of the People Bill**

We are writing to you from a range of charities involved in youth justice as we are concerned about the impact of Clause 2 of the Representation of the People Bill.

We would like to begin by saying that we welcome the government's commitment to extend the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds. From our work we see every day that many young people are politically engaged, educated, and deserve a say in their future.

Clause 2 of the Representation of the People Bill will block this right for 16- and 17-year-olds serving a sentence in youth detention. The message this sends to vulnerable young people is clear: politics does not care about you.

As well as further marginalising already marginalised communities, removing the right to vote at a young age cuts civic connections and harms rehabilitation at the time it is most needed.

The most recent government statistics show that 610 children received a custodial sentence in England and Wales in the year up to March 2025. This will affect hundreds of young people who will be told that they cannot participate in democracy whilst their friends can. This will have a significant impact on where these young people feel their place in society is, on their chances of rehabilitation, and how they feel about our democracy.

We support the aims of the Representation of the People Bill, to widen participation and strengthen our democracy. At a time of declining trust in institutions and democracy, this is crucial. Clause 2 of the Bill hinders rather than helps these aims.

The government are right to have committed to reform of childhood criminal records this year, accepting that people should not be held back for life for mistakes made as children. By blocking the right to vote for young people at the earliest opportunity, Clause 2 risks severing democratic ties for life for childhood misdemeanours.

As the government outlined in the policy paper ahead of the publication of the Bill, “the strength of our democracy is determined by how much of the country participates”. Sadly, Clause 2 will block already marginalised young people from participating in our democracy.

We are asking that you reconsider Clause 2 and are calling for the government to scrap this harmful, arbitrary clause.

Yours sincerely,

**Paula Harriott**, Chief Executive of Unlock

**Penelope Gibbs**, Director of Transform Justice

**Andrea Coomber KC (Hon.)**, Chief Executive of the Howard League for Penal Reform

**Gloria Morrison**, Founder of JENGBA

**Dr Amy Ludlow**, Chief Executive of SHiFT

**Sara Dowling**, CEO of Why me?

**Kehinde Adeogun**, Director of Legal Services and Policy at The Black Equity Organisation

**Dr Kathryn Hollingsworth**, Professor of Law and Criminal Justice at the University of Sheffield

**Dr Danica Darley**, University of Sheffield

**Andy Bell**, Chief Executive of the Centre for Mental Health

**The Children’s Society**

**Barrow Cadbury Trust**