

In 2020, voters across America, including some HMHS seniors, will cast their votes. There are many ways - apart from voting - that young people can be civically engaged. Describe how young people can get more involved in their community (as you choose to define community). Or, if you have been civically active within your community, describe that experience.

Throughout my civic experiences, I learned that in order to create change, the best way to start is to express an opinion. As a result, the best way to create a better community is to hear voices from all walks of life. Everyone's perspective is unique and equally significant. My civic involvement has varied from local to federal, although it always has a focus on the community it affects. I have been a member of the Girls' Leadership Council at the Alice Paul Institute for the past four years, and served as a Congressional Intern during the summer of 2019.

Girls Leadership Council provided opportunities to attend events and meet people who made a difference in public service. We meet regularly to discuss the issues facing women regionally and internationally, and how to best empower women. Over the years, we have met with activists and educators in order to better understand our civic duty and how to best empower ourselves and each other.

The summer after my sophomore year, a small group of members from the Girls Leadership Council visited Washington D.C. to meet with lobbyists and our local Representatives to discuss the Equal Rights Amendment. We learned, firsthand, how individuals can help push their issues forward. Not all the Congresspeople supported the amendment; one of the Congressmen argued that the bill would harm capitalism on account of salary transparency, although the Lilly Ledbetter Act already partially prevents gender-based discrimination in the workforce. We debated the importance of the ERA with him and hoped that he would change his opinion on the amendment. However, the other representatives we met with cosponsored the bill already; with them, we talked about how we could improve awareness of the amendment locally. Meeting with the representatives gave me the opportunity to express my opinion regarding an issue close to my heart, and hopefully create positive change.

This past summer, I was fortunate to serve as an intern for Congressman Donald Norcross. During my time at the office, I talked with constituents and helped the workers with their casework; I attended monthly town hall meetings and job fairs. The importance of constituent beliefs was reinforced regularly during my Congressional internship with Representative Norcross; the interns' responsibility was to respond to constituent calls and log their opinions into our database, which allowed both the district and D.C. offices knowledge of the causes supported.

Throughout my experiences as a leader within the Alice Paul Institute and my community, I have realized that the best way to create civic engagement is to reach out to the people around you. My experiences with local Congresspeople have taught me to speak up - and, more importantly, to listen to what other people have to say. Those in our community have varying situations, and all have interesting viewpoints and stories. As a result, everyone's opinions matter and should be expressed. The easiest way to become civically involved in any level of community is be aware of discussion - and join in.