

The League of Women Voters of Oregon is a 101-year-old grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We envision informed Oregonians participating in a fully accessible, responsive, and transparent government to achieve the common good. LWVOR Legislative Action is based on advocacy positions formed through studies and member consensus. The League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party.

March 11, 2021

To: [Senator Rob Wagner](#), Chair
[Senate Committee on Rules](#)

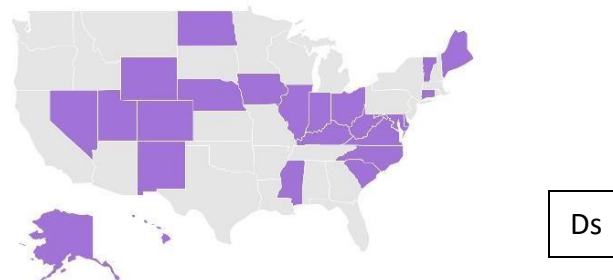
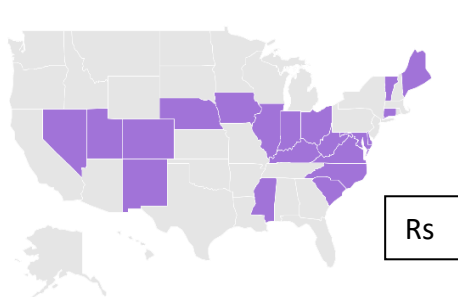
Re: **SB 776** – Voting in school district elections by 16 and 17-year-old registered voters – **Comments**

The League of Women Voters has worked, now for over 101 years, *to protect and encourage the civic duty of all citizens to vote*. Our position adds that *increased accessibility is integral to ensuring a representative electoral process and the right of every citizen to vote*. This bill addresses 16 and 17 year-old registered voters voting in their school district elections.

League youth voting positions focus on establishing responsible long-term voting habits. From our LWVUS senior staff “We do not have a firm position for or against a specific age. Many leagues have advocated for 17-year-old voters participating in primaries, certainly, as well as things like preregistration starting at 16, likely using the League’s Right to Vote position. This is from the LWV [Empowering the Voters of Tomorrow](#), 2018:

The League of Women Voters believes we all have a role to play in inspiring and empowering young Americans to register and vote. For us, that often means reaching out to potential new voters while they are still in high school. We have a special responsibility to reach out to those most often left behind: with no college experience, living in neighborhoods predominately of color, or where voter registration drives are rarely held.

17 year-olds were already able to vote in these Presidential Primaries, March 2020¹



Oregon is a trailblazer for automatic voter registration and vote by mail. We’re behind on this, though. In 23 states and the District of Columbia, 17-year-olds already vote in primaries and caucuses, mostly by state law, some by political party rules. Parties may request allowing 17-year-old primary voting by asserting First Amendment freedom of association rights. Piecemeal adoption has been confusing.²

When students are taught and then encouraged to register and then to vote, they are more likely to vote *and* further participate in other civic duties. Family engagement increases. They are less likely to feel their votes don’t matter. But 2/3 of white students, compared to 1/2 of black students retained and felt they’d been helped, so we need an awareness of equity outreach.³

LWVOR Student Mock Election fans, the National Council for the Social Studies, strongly feel that schools should teach students, not only how to register and fill out ballots, but how to learn about informed voting, and that they should learn voting, together while they are still in school.⁴

Leagues around the country shared:

CALIFORNIA: LWVC testified to a similar bill, based on the League Right to Vote position: "Seventeen-year-olds who will be 18 by the next general election should be able to vote in primary and special elections. Prop 18 will give them that right. Young people are significantly underrepresented in California's electorate. Allowing 17-year-olds to vote in primary and special elections will engage young voters while they are studying the issues in high school and have a strong interest in participation. Once voting begins it becomes a life-long habit. Furthermore, fairness dictates that people who will be eligible to vote in a general election should be able to help choose the candidates who will be on that ballot. Finally, many 17-year-olds are civically engaged and at the forefront of movements to improve the communities in which they live. We would all benefit from their voices at the ballot box."

MAINE: There are two bills up in Maine – a constitutional amendment to lower the voting age to 17 for state elections and a bill to allow towns to lower the age for local elections. In [League Advocacy video](#), The Maine Secretary of State referred to statute:

- "A person who has not yet reached 18 years of age but will be 18 years of age at the time of a general election and meets all other qualifications in order to vote in a primary election may vote in the primary election for the selection of candidates to be on the ballot at that general election."⁵
- *And here:* "The registrar shall conditionally accept the registration and enrollment of any person who is 16 or 17 years of age and who is otherwise qualified to be a voter. The conditional registration automatically becomes effective on the person's 18th birthday and the registrant then is eligible to vote.... A person who has registered under this section and who has not attained 18 years of age may vote by absentee ballot at any election if that person attains 18 years of age on or before the date of the election and is otherwise eligible to vote by absentee ballot."⁶

NEW MEXICO: LWVNM supported our version of that bill. Many of the students who testified so persuasively in support of the bill have become voter registrars in their schools and communities. They are the best advocates for civic engagement as you know.

SOUTH CAROLINA: Anyone who will be 18 by general election day may vote in the primaries that precede it in South Carolina, which are usually in June. In addition, 16 is the minimum age to be employed as a poll worker. My granddaughter turned 16 on November 1st and was at work at the polls on November 3rd, having taken the training when she was still 15.

UTAH: We in Salt Lake have simply supported our student board member as she requests that the Legislature to allow teens to vote on school board elections.

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Through thoughtful collaboration, we can inspire young people to become active and engaged leaders for tomorrow. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation.



Rebecca Gladstone
LWVOR President



Norman Turrill
LWVOR Governance Coordinator

1. [State-By-State Map: Presidential; Primaries](#). FairVote, last updated March 2020
2. [Primary voting at Age 17, The Facts: 17-Year-Old Primary Voting](#). (n.d.). FairVote
3. [Youth Who Learned about Voting in High School More Likely to Become Informed and Engaged Voters](#). Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, Tisch College, Tufts University, August 31, 2020.
4. [Should Schools Teach Students to Vote? YES!](#) Diana E. Hess, Democracy Education, Social Education 76(6), pp 283-289, National Council for the Social Studies. Nov/Dec 2012.
5. Maine Legislature, Maine Revised Statutes, [Title 21-A: Elections, Chapter 3: Voter Registration, Subchapter 2: Voter Eligibility](#). §11-A Voting age qualification for primary elections.
6. Maine Legislature, Maine Revised Statutes, [Title 21-A: Elections, Chapter 3: Voter Registration, Subchapter 3: Registration and Enrollment, Article 3: Provisions common to registration and enrollment procedures](#). §155. Advance registration and enrollment.