

Senator Rob Wagner, Chair  
Senator Fred Girod, Vice Chair  
Senate Committee On Rules

Thursday, March 11, 2021

Support for SB 776 and SJR 25

I am a high school senior and a representative to the Lake Oswego School Board. After learning about the success of expanding voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds in several US cities, I have been researching its implementation in Lake Oswego and working with city and district leaders on gauging support.

The fact of the matter is that the high schoolers are the most significant stakeholders in regards to school district affairs. We are affected every day by the decisions made by our school board (curriculum, bond money allocation, board-appointed committees), so we ought to have a say in deciding who represents us. We are expected to follow the rules, but have no say in making them. SB 776 would ameliorate this paradox by giving students the tools necessary to effect change directly.

Reading through the testimonies in opposition of SB 776 and SJR 25, the common thread is the perception that 16 and 17 year olds are not mature or informed enough to have a say in the matters which directly affect us. To this I have a few responses:

Firstly, in a 2011 study published in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 16-year-olds were found to demonstrate understanding similar to that of adults between the ages of 19-30 on measures of civic knowledge, political skills, and political efficacy. Another 2012 study published in *Electoral Studies* indicates that “16- and 17-year-olds come up with a vote choice that best represents their own political attitudes as often as older voters do.” **The studies prove that 16 year olds are just as capable of informed voting as 30 year olds.** If 16 year olds, contrary to empiric data, are believed to be too immature to vote, then logically the voting age should be raised to over 30. 16 and 17 year olds are ready to vote.

Secondly, 16 year olds are old enough to drive cars, work jobs, and pay taxes; how is voting not a more eminent priority? If this age is not mature enough to vote, surely we must not be mature enough to contribute to society through working and paying taxes. Additionally, 16 and 17 year olds who pay taxes have no say in where their tax dollars go, which is ironically the same problem which galvanized American independence (we spend months worth of middle

and high school history classes learning about “no taxation without representation”) and cemented representation as a core tenet of American democracy.

Thirdly, students have been increasingly active in political advocacy and civic engagement. Especially since last summer, the younger generation has come to a collective understanding that we are to bear the torches of progress soon, and we must act now to ensure a viable future. Voter turnout among youth is on an incline. Specifically in regards to schools, students are the most immersed in the schooling system, and therefore have valuable insight on what should be done. This insight must be translated into a ballot to give it the weight it deserves.

The effects of passing SB 776 and SJR 25 are tremendously beneficial to students, and thus to Oregon’s future, as they will boost civic engagement, creating life-long voters; and lay the groundwork for productive collaboration between students and their leaders, giving more weight to student voices. SB 776 and SJR 25 intuitively and empirically are necessary for the proper representation of Oregon’s youth. I strongly urge senators to support these bills. Thank you.