

March 11th, 2021

Senate Committee on Rules
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony in Support of SB 776

Chair and Majority Leader Wagner, Vice Chair Girod, and members of the committee,

My name is Andrea Valderrama and I am here in my personal capacity as a school board member on the David Douglas School Board. The David Douglas School District is a racially and ethnically diverse school district in outer east Portland with over 60% students of color, more than 67 languages spoken, 10,000+ students and over 1,500 employees. I am here in strong support of SB 776.

Leading with my values of self determination and an accessible democracy, the choice to support expanding access to our school board elections is an easy one. Research suggests that lowering the voting age can improve voter turnout, spur civic engagement, and encourage effective civic education.

In the David Douglas school district, students have already proven themselves as civic leaders. We saw them lead protests in Portland in 2018 after the brutal school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High. We saw them organizing last year calling for justice for Black lives all across the district and city. And, this year, when we threw transition after transition their way, we saw them rise yet again to meet the challenges of this global pandemic. They are a constant presence in our school board meetings, testifying on items about school resource officers, reopening of schools, heritage months, resource allocation and on many other decisions that impact their lives. They deserve to vote in our elections. While this level of engagement is not always the case in every school district, lowering the voting age to 16 for school board elections can ensure that school boards are responsive to the needs of all students.

In a time when there are many uncertainties around us, I am certain of one truth: this generation is fierce and determined, and they deserve full access to the democracy we promised them. Studies show that younger, first-time voters are more likely to become life-long, habitual voters. Data from places that have lowered the voting age shows that 16-year-olds vote at higher rates than first-time voters.

Representation in leadership positions matters. Just five years ago, I was the first and only person to serve on the David Douglas School District Board of Directors. With a majority student of color population, it is exciting (and overdue) to envision a future not so far away in which that racial and ethnic diversity is also reflected on our board. The first step towards this more accessible and representative democracy is passing this bill.

I strongly urge you to vote in favor of SB 776.

Thank you,

Andrea Valderrama, Position 6
David Douglas School District Board of Directors