

Chair Leon and members of the committee, I am writing to you today to express my fervent support of SB 513.

Civics education during my high school years had a profound impact on my life. Participating in afterschool programs like Classroom Law Project's Mock Trial, the YMCA's Youth & Government program, and the American Legion's Boy's State all taught me about how our society functions, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens within that society. While many subjects in school are important and necessary to develop an individual's knowledge and critical thinking skills, civics encourages students to take a look outside of themselves and learn about how to interact with others in a community setting. Instilling a sense of community responsibility at a young age is important for young people who are choosing what they would like to do after graduation, and teaches them the extremely valuable tools of empathy (through thinking about and addressing the needs of others) and compromise (through working with others and not relying solely on their own experiences) both of which help to promote a healthy society.

Furthermore, a lack of understanding of how policies are made and administered can create confusion, consternation, and animosity within the electorate. When the way to change a law or policy is a "black box" that the general public doesn't fully understand, it can seem like they have no agency to change things within the society they live. Problems at the community level require solutions that engage that community, and allow their input on solutions that will work for them. This interaction allows for community buy-in and support that will make programs more successful, and accesses a wider audience of people who can brainstorm solutions that are more innovative, more feasible, and more equitable than what might otherwise be created. But, when the barrier to engagement is made higher (by having to learn so much about how the systems of government work) it discourages community input, and opportunities for growth and development are lost.

Lastly, too many people look almost exclusively to elected leaders to solve problems, sometimes problems that are not theirs to solve. Too often running for elected office is seen as the only way in which someone can interact with or impact their community, and while public office is a path towards public service, it is not the only one. Making it seem as if you have to become an elected official to do anything puts too much pressure on those elected officials to solve every problem, and takes away too much agency from citizens to address those problems themselves. When people are calling state senators about trash pick-up, or federal congressional representatives about local zoning issues, it means that there is a confusion about where power and responsibility lay. This leads to inefficient or ineffective assistance being provided, and time being wasted for both people.

In a time when there are dire issues facing our society at every level what better tool can we equip young people and the leaders of the future with than the skills necessary to come together in a community and solve problems? Thank you for your time, I hope that you will vote in favor of this bill.