

Chair Fahey, Vice-Chair Breese-Iverson and Kropf, and members of the committee.

You will hear from me in my zoom testimony on the 21st of February. There I will talk about why this issue is important. Here, I wanted to address some of the concerns I have heard from legislatures as I believe it would be critical for the Committee to hear.

One concern I came across while meeting a Representative, she brought up how it might be better to start with school board elections so we can work out any kinks in the process. While I completely understand this approach, Rep. Noose and Rep. Hoa Nguyen have modeled this bill after successful initiatives in Takoma Park, Hyattsville, and Greenbelt. These are three US cities that have lowered their voting age to 16 for municipal and school board elections. These three cities have successfully implemented this legislation for years and they have seen great youth voter turnout, higher grades in civics classes, and lifelong voters. There will not be any kinks in the process because of the model set by other places. Takoma Park modeled their legislation on the twenty-one countries that have successfully lowered the voting age to 16. The first year of the lower voting age was 1976. I have been working directly with Congresswomen Ayanna Pressly to discuss how it went for her when she proposed this legislation a few years back. I can assure you, Oregon will not fall victim to a broken voting system because of 16 and 17-year-olds.

Another concern is that Oregon does not have a well-rounded civic education program and the 16 and 17-year-olds who are in these classes, aren't learning enough. This is and isn't true. Oregon has proposed MANY civic education bills and they have all been successful. Because of this House, Governor Kotek, and Majority Leader Fahey, Oregon civic education has risen greatly. I have met with teachers here in Oregon and we both agree that when 16 and 17-year-olds are participating in the democratic process of voting while learning about it, we can ensure an informed electorate because teachers can usher the importance of voting and address any questions they have directly.

Lastly, there is the initial gut reaction of “Their brains aren't mature enough”. While it is true that brains do not fully mature until the mid to late 20s, voting decisions rely on cold cognition. This is something that 16 and 17-year-olds have excelled in during neuro studies. We also allow 18-year-olds to vote. If you are to stick with the argument above, you are also saying the group of 18-24 does not deserve to have voting rights. And that would be crazy.

So, now that you are informed about this decision, I hope you will usher in the passage of HJR 20 and get your colleagues to vote in favor of HJR 20. There is no reason this bill should not be passed. The only debate against this bill is the emotional reactions that scientific research has out-ruled over and over again.