

HJR20 Testimony

Chair Fahey, Vice-Chairs Breese-Iverson and Kropf, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Brandy Penner, I am a parent and former chair and director of the Newberg School Board.

I am here today to speak to the importance of allowing 16 and 17-year-old Oregonians to participate in our democratic process to help ensure that we are a state with leaders and laws representing and serving all Oregonians.

Including 16 and 17-year-old in the democratic process will engage and empower lifelong voters and help ensure that elected officials are held accountable by their youngest constituents.

I have experienced firsthand the consequences of an elected body that wielded power unchecked to those they were meant to serve. Students saw their educational opportunities taken away and their futures stunted by elected officials who were supposed to serve them. They pleaded to the deaf ears of elected officials who knew they had no accountability to these powerless students.

I have enjoyed serving alongside 16 and 17-year-old students on my local and state boards. In my experience, both professionally and personally, students are eager to engage and participate in governance. Allowing Oregon students to vote bridges their lived experiences and what they are learning in the classroom, creating a powerful lesson in the importance of civics.

Oregon has the opportunity to be a leader in educating and empowering students to be a governing force in their lives, to elect leaders that prioritize their needs, and to shape a stronger Oregon for all of us.

Thank you for your time and consideration.