



Isabela Villarreal  
RE: Support HB 3206

February 21st, 2023

Chair Fahey, Vice-Chairs Breese-Iverson and Kropf, and Members of the <Name> Committee,

My name is Isabela Villarreal and I am the Policy and Communications Director at Next Up Action Fund. As an organization that builds political power and strong, effective leadership pipelines for young people, our work and our communities are greatly impacted by an accessible and representative democracy. Today we're here in strong support of HB 3206 which would allow 16 and 17-year-olds to participate in school board elections.

Lowering the Voting Age to 16 is one of Next Up Action Fund's priority issues. We first introduced the constitutional measure in 2019, and then in the 2021 legislative session we re-introduced that bill along with a bill allowing 16 and 17 year olds to vote in school district elections. We are excited to see these concepts being reintroduced once again because we know civic habits are more likely to stick when developed at a younger age.

Every day, school board members make incredibly important decisions that directly impact the lives of students. Yet, most high school students don't get to determine who is elected. The choice to support access to students voting on school boards is a straightforward one. Students should be able to help determine who is making decisions about their schools, which impact their everyday lives.

I urge you to see this as a wonderful opportunity to make Oregon a leader in civic engagement for young people. Voting on issues that directly impact their lives - prepares students to participate in democracy. Lessons on civic engagement become real when paired with concrete opportunities to exercise political power and responsibility, especially when they can have a say in who is making decisions about their school. By allowing students to vote in school board elections we would become a leader in the nation for creating a meaningful and tangible opportunity for young people to play a role in shaping our democracy.

This can seem like a big step, but it shouldn't be scary. During the 2020 general election, Oakland voters passed a measure that will allow students that are at least 16 years old to vote in Oakland Unified School District school board elections.

We have an incredible opportunity to improve voter turnout, ensure schools are responsive to students, spur civic engagement, and encourage effective civic education. As a leader in the country for our innovation towards accessible and equitable elections, I strongly urge that you support the voices of students by passing HB 3206 out of committee.

Thank you,

Isabela Villarreal  
Policy and Communications Manager, Next Up Action Fund