

Hoa Nguyen
State Representative
District 48



OREGON HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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

Currently I work as a Student and Community Engagement Specialist at Clackamas Education Service District. Before this, I was a School Attendance Coach at PPS for nearly a decade. I was also a Sun Community School Coordinator. I also serve on the David Douglas School Board. I share this to illustrate that I have been working with, and advocating for, youth for my entire professional career. That is a fundamental value of my work as a public servant.

That is why my students see me as a trusted ally. Through my work and in my community, I heard from students over and over that they are ready for the responsibility of voting. They see the direct impact that having the privilege to participate in our democracy will have on their lives. They fully recognize that the decision we, as their elected leaders, make today will have very real consequences for them, for the rest of their lives.

We know that historically, the biggest demographic of voters has been older, often retirees. And while we must value the vast life experience our elders bring, I also see that they often don't have the same priorities, or even the same values, as our youth. The biggest concerns facing my students are issues of climate change, something they feel we are not taking urgent steps on; cyber bullying, something many elected leaders never had to deal with as youth; and a struggling economy that they inherited. They are frightened that they won't have the same opportunities for home ownership, higher education, or even financial security, that many of their leaders had. As our world changes, our laws must change with it, and no one is more aware of these changes than students who are about to graduate from high school and take their first steps out into the world.

The main goal of this effort is to invigorate our democracy by fostering active and engaged citizens. We know that when people develop civic habits at a younger age, they're more likely to stick. Lowering the voting age will encourage young people to become more engaged in the political process and will help to build a lifelong habit of voting. Research suggests that allowing 16 and 17 year olds to vote can improve voter turnout, spur civic engagement, and encourage effective civics education; data from jurisdictions that have lowered the voting age shows that 16-year-olds do indeed vote at higher rates than older first-time voters.

16 or 17 year olds are already entitled to be dual-enrolled in community college, serve in the military, drive, pay taxes, be tried as adults in the criminal justice system and work up to 44 hours per week and should have a voice in a system in which they already participate in. In many families, the oldest children are responsible for their younger siblings. I spent most of my childhood helping my parents at their store and my three younger siblings with their school work as the “chị hai” or oldest sister in the family. This experience taught me that there is not one specific, universal age when we become ready to take on more responsibility. Everyone matures differently, and our youth especially, have had to mature faster than my generation did, as they prepare to take on the many struggling systems in our country that they are set to inherit. They are affected by many of the laws and policies decided upon by elected officials, yet they are denied the right to vote for those officials.

I have always viewed my role in my students' lives as that of lifting up their voices, being the adult in the room that took them seriously, and valuing their life experience. That is what I am doing now, by championing HJR20 — I am using my voice and platform to speak on behalf of Oregon's youth, so that they may have the opportunity to use their voice at the ballot.

rep.hoanguyen@oregonlegislature.gov
900 Court Street, H-473, Salem OR, 97301
503.986.1448 | oregonlegislature.gov/nguyen

