



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Testimony in Support of HJR 20, HB 3206

February 21, 2023

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

My name is Khanh Pham, State Representative for House District 46. I am honored to offer my testimony in support of three bills that expand young Oregonian's access to the voting franchise here in our state.

At a time when other states are exploiting the misinformation about election fraud to introduce hundreds of bills attacking the right to vote, Oregon can lead by expanding access to the vote and restoring confidence in our democracy.

Some critics may ask, "Why should we provide teenagers the right to choose their elected representatives?" and imply that voting is a privilege that should be guarded, rather a right that should be expanded. These are the same kinds of questions asked by naysayers when every disenfranchised group has stepped forward to demand ballot access - from the women suffragettes in 1920, to Native American communities in 1962, to Black civil rights workers for who braved fierce attacks to secure the full right to vote for over a century, from emancipation to the signing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, a struggle that continues to this day.

Yes, if these bills become law, there will be changes that our county clerks will have to adjust to, and this has been the case every time we've enfranchised more Oregonians to be a part of our civic culture. These are the investments we make to ensure that our government is for the people, elected by the people to serve on their behalf. The definition of who those people are has always evolved in the course of our state's history, and will continue to evolve in the decades to come. These changes are worth it.

In Oregon, a minor must generally be at least 14 years old to work (with a notable exception in agriculture for children as young as nine). If our statute says a child is old enough to work at 16, and therefore old enough to pay taxes through withholding out of her paycheck, should she not also have a right to vote in our elections?

If an Oregonian attends a high school, shouldn't she be able to participate in choosing her school board? If she is old enough to drive, shouldn't she be allowed to choose which candidate will prioritize road safety? If an Oregonian expects to grow up and grow old in her community, she has a stake in who leads her community now.

I believe it is our role to expand the franchise to more Oregonians, to expand opportunities for residents to shape how our communities are led and governed, to lower barriers for participation in self-government, and to proactively take steps to show the people of Oregon that we welcome and encourage the vote for those who want to vote.

Oregonians deserve the freedom and the chance to decide for themselves at the ballot, and that includes the teenagers who will live with the consequences of what elected leaders chose to do, or not to do, today.

I urge your support for **HJR 20** and **HB 3206**.