

RE: Support for HB 3206
House Committee on Rules

February 23, 2023

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

My name is Elona Wilson and I live in Portland. I am writing to testify in strong support of HB 3206, which will allow 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in school district elections.

It's evident that civic habits are more likely to stick when developed at a younger age. Research suggests that allowing 16 and 17-year-olds to vote can improve voter turnout, spur civic engagement, and encourage effective civics education.

As a person who worked in the community involvement and public affairs department for Portland Public Schools a few years ago, and a couple years after graduating high school, I can tell you that the vast separation between students, the school district's primary stakeholder, is one of the central reasons PPS is failing its Black and brown students. School board members are elected in the largest district in Oregon, without the say of students so it is not surprising that they are not attune to what is happening on the ground.

As a graduate of Portland Public Schools, I didn't realize all that the district does because I didn't really have a stake in it– decisions were always made for me. While people simultaneously told me that I was an adult now and had to be more responsible, I was given no autonomy nor a voice– doesn't that sound like tokenization to you? And a couple years later when I worked for the district doing community engagement I realized that not much had changed. When students don't have ownership, how can we expect graduation rates and learning to increase?

Students are not sponges, absorbing all the information poured into them, they are their own beings and if we want to bring our districts out of the stone age where people **guess** what young people need to succeed, the first step is giving them a real voice..

16 or 17 year olds are already entitled to 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 how a system in which they already participate is run. As I have

gotten older I had assumed that people would get more wise, more mature and more adult-like but as I am realizing that is absolutely not the case. 16 and 17 year olds deserve the right to vote on issues that affect them on the local level. Lowering the voting age would force local politicians to listen to youth and address their concerns.

I urge you to pass HB 3206 out of the committee.

Thank you,

Elona Wilson