

RE: Support for Our Future, Our Vote - HJR 20
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 HJR 20, which will lower the voting age from 18 years old to 16.

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 someone who has worked with young people ever since graduating from high school in 2014, I can tell you that the vast separation between 16 and 17 year olds is one of the central reasons Oregon is failing its Black and brown youth. Lawmakers are elected in Oregon, without the say of youth 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?

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 HJR 20 out of the committee.

Thank you,

Elona Wilson