

Dear Chair Bowman, Vice-Chairs Drazan and Pham, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Amanda Orozco Beach, and I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB 3012. As a former School Board Director for the Gresham-Barlow School District (2019 - 2023) and a current substitute teacher in the same school district, I have had firsthand experience with the disconnect between those making decisions about our schools and the students who are directly impacted by those decisions.

School Board elections consistently see alarmingly low voter turnout, often around 10%. This lack of engagement means that a small, often unrepresentative, portion of our community dictates the policies that shape our schools. HB 3012 addresses this gap by ensuring that students, who are the ones most affected by these elections, have a direct say in who represents them on their local school boards.

Some may argue that 16- and 17-year-olds are not mature enough to vote. Yet, we entrust them with responsibilities that require significant judgment and decision-making. At 16, they can obtain a driver's license, a responsibility that involves life-or-death decisions every time they get behind the wheel. If we trust them to make split-second decisions on the road, we should trust them to make an informed decision about who governs their education.

Furthermore, School Boards and educators serve our students, not a vocal minority of community members who may have no direct connection to our schools. The people who will be most impacted by curriculum decisions, budget allocations, and district policies are the students themselves. It is only fair that they have a seat at the table through their vote. This process may even encourage more engagement in future elections after they are 18 years old.

I urge this committee to pass HB 3012 and allow our students the opportunity to engage in the democratic process. When we empower young people to vote early, we instill lifelong civic engagement habits, strengthening our democracy for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Amanda Orozco Beach

Former Gresham-Barlow School Board Director

Substitute Teacher