

Dear Chair Bowman, Vice Chair Drazan, Vice Chair Pham, Rep. Boshart Davis, Rep. Elmer, Rep. Kropf, and Rep. Valderrama,

I appreciate the time you are taking to read testimonies.

I am writing to express my opposition to House Bill 3012. While I acknowledge the intent to involve our youth in educational decision-making, I have several concerns regarding this legislation.

As a business owner who employs 16- and 17-year-olds, I have firsthand experience with the development and decision-making abilities of individuals in this age group. While many of them are bright, hardworking, and eager to learn, they are also still developing critical thinking skills and long-term planning abilities. I regularly see them struggle with managing schedules, financial responsibility, and basic workplace decision-making—tasks far simpler than weighing the complexities of school budgets, policies, and governance. Expecting them to make informed voting decisions on these intricate matters is premature.

Oregon recognizes 18 as the age of majority, the point at which individuals are granted full civic responsibilities. Lowering the voting age for school district elections creates an inconsistency in our legal framework. If 16- and 17-year-olds are deemed mature enough to vote on school policies, why are they not extended the same rights in other civic matters, such as signing legal contracts or serving on a jury?

Allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in school district elections risks amplifying the voices of students over other key stakeholders, including parents, educators, and taxpayers who fund and depend on the school system. Many of my young employees have admitted they rarely follow local news or policy discussions, relying heavily on social media and peer influence for opinions. This is not the foundation for responsible voting. Decision-making in school governance should be led by extensive research and understanding of educational and community needs.

While I fully support engaging young people in civic discussions and preparing them for future responsibilities, voting in school district elections should remain reserved for those who have reached the legal age of 18. Instead of lowering the voting age, I encourage alternative approaches such as student advisory councils or expanded civic education programs that empower young people without altering our voting system.

Thank you for considering my perspective.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Jacobson Brusa
Beloved Cheesecakes