

Testimony to the Oregon House Rules Committee in Support of HB 3012: The Student Voice and Democracy Act

Chair Bowman, Vice Chair Drazan, Vice Chair Pham, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jasia Mosley, and I am submitting testimony on behalf of the Student Voice and Democracy Act Coalition in strong support of HB 3012, which would allow eligible and registered 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in nonpartisan school board elections starting in 2029, giving students a critical voice in their education thereby strengthening our democracy.

Oregon students care deeply about their communities and giving them an active voice in their education is a positive investment in their academic success and development as more civically engaged citizens. Research by the National Center for Education Statistics shows that schools that successfully engage students outside the classroom in sports, clubs, and other activities are strongly associated with better attendance and higher graduation rates (1995). School boards significantly influence the educational experience, shaping policies that can profoundly impact students' lives, and students deserve a say.

Oregon high schools play a key role in ensuring that all students graduate with the information they need to be engaged and informed participants in our democracy. In 2021, the Oregon legislature adopted SB 513, which requires all high school students to, "earn 0.5 civics course credit to fulfill graduation requirements, beginning with the class of 2026" (ODE, 2021). Students learn best when class material is relevant to their lives, and there is no better way to make civics classes relevant than by inviting students into the voting booth for a local election that highly impacts their lives.

This bill would build on Oregon's legacy of being a national leader in ensuring citizens have the freedom to vote for who best represents them. As of 2025, a dozen other jurisdictions in the U.S. have already passed policies allowing 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in municipal elections with success (Generation Citizen, 2024). Additionally, 19 states already allow 17-year-olds to vote in

primary elections if they turn 18 by the general election, thus demonstrating that this age bracket is well-equipped to vote in local school board elections (Ballotpedia, 2024).

Not only have thousands of 16 and 17-year-olds already voted in elections in the United States, but according to a study done by The American Academy of Political and Social Science, evidence suggests that 16-year-olds have the requisite civic knowledge and skills, and mental reasoning ability to vote the same as their 18-year-old peers (Hart, D., & Atkins, R. 2011). According to Nick Allen, a professor of clinical psychology at the University of Oregon, "If you're going to let an 18-year-old vote there's no reason why you shouldn't let a 16-year - vote from a developmental point of view" (Begley, P. 2015). Voting is a behavior that relies on a thought process that is sometimes called "cold cognition" – a slow, deliberate, thought-out decision-making process. This is the opposite of "hot cognition" – the high-pressure, impulsive decision-making process. It is true that 16-year-olds are not as good as older adults at hot cognition, but they are just as good as older young adults at cold cognition (Bergley, P., 2015).

With Oregon's robust voter pre-registration system for 16 and 17-year-olds, we are well-equipped to smoothly transition to implementing this bill (Oregon Legislature, 2023). As of 2025, there are around 50,000 16 and 17-year-olds already pre-registered to vote (Secretary of State, 2025).

The Student Voice and Democracy Act will amplify the voices of thousands of students and keep decision-makers responsive to the primary recipients of school services: students. We urge you to pass HB 3012 this legislative session.

Thank you for your time,

Jasia Mosley
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Policy Manager, Next Up Action Fund

Coalition Endorsers

- ACLU of Oregon
- Oregon AFL-CIO
- AFSCME Local 75
- AFT-Oregon
- APANO
- Basic Rights Oregon
- Center for Childhood Safety and Wellbeing (CSAW)
- Common Cause Oregon
- East County Rising Action
- Family Forward
- Latino Network
- More Equitable Democracy Action
- Next Up Action Fund
- Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries
- Oregon Association of Student Councils
- Oregon Education Association
- Oregon Environmental Council
- Oregon School Nurses' Association
- Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force
- Our Children Oregon
- Our Future by Partners for Sustainable Schools
- Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon
- PCUN
- Prevent Child Abuse Oregon
- REAP Inc.
- Southern Oregon Success
- The Vocal Seniority
- Unite Oregon
- Urban League of Portland
- Vote 16 Oregon
- Vote 16 USA

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