

Submitter: Teresa Cheney
Committee: House Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: Support HB 3012

Chair Bowman, Vice Chair Drazan, Vice Chair Pham and members of the House Committee on Rules,

My name is Teresa Cheney, and I live in Portland, Oregon. I am writing to testify in strong support of the Student Voice and Democracy Act, HB 3012, which will allow registered 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in local school board elections, giving students a critical voice in their education thereby strengthening our democracy.

A short list of reasons for my support of this approach that I believe will strengthen our educational system and continue to foster a strong American Democracy:

- Allowing qualified 16- and 17-year olds to actively participate in their local school board elections, along with their 18-year-old counterparts, would increase awareness of their civic responsibility as they engage in issues that affect them directly; namely, the safety issues within and surrounding their school, athletic programs and opportunities, strengthening understanding of civics studies and overall curriculum prior to participation in general elections, to name just a few.
- Providing early engagement and participation opportunities in the educational system that will have an effect on them for the rest of their lives fosters a deeper understanding of the importance of American Democracy and its impact on their communities.
- Research from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University indicates that voting for the first time at age 18 can be particularly difficult to navigate. Support for civics engagement at an earlier age would help alleviate that pressure and/or lack of understanding, especially for those that have moved away from home and/or lacking in family support.

- Officials at Oregon HECC [Higher Education Coordination Commission] agree that improving graduation rates in the state will be essential to avoid the projected 19% decline in high school graduates over the next 18 years. Fostering civic responsibility by allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to be more fully engaged to create the healthy educational, social, and civic environments these students envision can have a positive impact on how they choose to engage within their communities post graduation.

As a professional with 40+ years of working around the country with preschool through university level students, I understand the need to continually encourage each generation to be as engaged and as empowered as possible so that the educational system and our very Democracy is upheld to its highest standards. I am also very proud to be a parent of an adult child that chose to enter into community engagement services before leaving high school, as she saw the need for change and chose to be an active participant to support the needs of her community. This does not happen by chance.

It takes visionaries for change and I strongly support this proposal and encourage you to look beyond party lines to do what is best for this next generation.

Thank you,
Teresa Cheney