



Representative Hoa Nguyen
Oregon House District 48

HB 3012 - STUDENT DEMOCRACY ACT

3/3 House Education Committee

Thank you, Chair, vice chair and members of the committee. I am State Representative Hoa Nguyen, and I represent House District 48, which includes outer Southeast Portland and North Clackamas County.

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 3012, which proposes to extend voting rights in school district elections to 16- and 17-year-old Oregonians.

Students aged 16 and 17 are deeply immersed in the educational system and are directly affected by the decisions made by school boards. Allowing them to vote in school district elections acknowledges their vested interest and ensures that their perspectives are considered in decisions that impact their daily lives. As noted by the Oregon Capital Chronicle, this legislative proposal aims to "lower the voting age for school board elections," thereby granting older teens a voice in the governance of their education.

Research indicates that early engagement in voting can lead to the development of lifelong voting habits. By lowering the voting age to 16 for school district elections, we provide young people with the opportunity to participate in the democratic process at a formative age, increasing the likelihood that they will remain active voters throughout their lives. The National Youth Rights Association emphasizes that lowering the voting age can "make our electoral system more inclusive and beneficial for all."

Including 16- and 17-year-olds in the electorate ensures that school boards are more representative of the communities they serve. This inclusion holds elected officials accountable to a broader constituency, leading to decisions that better reflect the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders. The Center for American Progress highlights that school board members play a crucial role in shaping education, and their decisions should be informed by the diverse voices within the community.

Several jurisdictions have successfully lowered the voting age for local elections, providing valuable insights into the potential benefits of such a change. For instance, in Oakland, California, a successful ballot measure granted 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in local school board elections, empowering thousands of high school students to participate in the electoral process.

As an educator and school board member, I have witnessed firsthand the passion, insight, and maturity that many 16- and 17-year-old students bring to discussions about their education. House Bill 3012 represents a meaningful step toward recognizing and harnessing this potential by granting them a formal voice in school district elections. I urge the committee to support this bill and, in doing so, affirm our commitment to inclusive and representative educational governance.

Thank you for considering my testimony.