

Michael Lynch

Oregon House Committee on Rules
900 Court St. NE,
Salem Oregon 97301

Dear Members of the Oregon State Legislature,

I am writing to express my strong support for lowering the voting age to 16 for school district elections. Empowering 16- and 17-year-olds to vote represents an important step toward a more inclusive and dynamic democracy that values the voices of all its members.

I was able to cast my first vote when I was 16. This helped strengthen my desire for public service and the importance of civic engagement. After I cast my second vote (also when I was 16 but in a special town election), I started attending meetings with the Vote16 Research Network at the University of Maryland. When I was 17, I served as an election judge, working all day to help run an election I couldn't vote in. 16- and 17-year-olds are already registered to vote, and many are engaged in the political climate. By giving them the right to vote, we encourage them to be better citizens and improve our democracy.

Research and practical experience have demonstrated that lowering the voting age fosters lifelong civic engagement. Voting is a habit that, when developed early, leads to increased participation in future elections. Sixteen-year-olds are uniquely positioned to form this habit, as they are often in stable environments supported by families, educators, and communities that encourage civic learning and action. Cities in Maryland like Takoma Park, Hyattsville, and Greenbelt have seen higher turnout rates among 16- and 17-year-olds compared to older first-time voters, proving that young people are eager to participate when given the chance. Moreover, 16- and 17-year-olds contribute meaningfully to their communities. They work, pay taxes, and are affected by decisions on education, including those made by school districts. By enfranchising these young residents, Oregon would not only expand its electorate but also invigorate its democratic processes with fresh perspectives.

Lowering the voting age offers an opportunity to build on the successful examples set by neighboring cities and demonstrates a commitment to preparing the next generation of voters. I urge you to seize this opportunity to lead boldly and inclusively by lowering the voting age to 16. Doing so will enhance the vibrancy of our local democracy and affirm Oregon's role as a trailblazer in empowering all citizens.

Thank you for your consideration of this important measure. I am confident that your leadership will help create a more engaged and representative community.

Sincerely,
Michael Lynch