

Testimony submitted by: LaJuana Decker
Committee: House Committee on Rules
Measure: HB3012

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

As a former educator, I am writing to express strong opposition to HB 3012. This bill is a misguided attempt to engage students in the political process before they are capable of assuming the responsibilities of adult decision-making. Even without considering the cost in time, money, and wavering public confidence in elections, this bill is poor policy that shows a lack of understanding of cognitive development, the responsibilities of financial stewardship, and social realities.

Students of age 16 or 17 are still developing the cognitive maturity and the discernment to make wise choices. This is why they cannot sign a legal contract or enlist in the military or purchase tobacco products or alcohol. It's why they are not tried as adults when they commit a serious offense that would land an adult in jail.

Anyone who has lived through the teen years or seen the latest dangerous TikTok challenge—Chew a Tide pod? Change your eye color with a mix of hand sanitizer, bleach, and shaving cream?—knows that young people are often easily influenced by peers into making unwise decisions. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services notes that:

Different sections of the brain develop at different times, with the part of the brain responsible for abstract thinking, planning, and decision making developing last. Overall, the brain is not fully developed and protected until people are in their mid-twenties.”¹

They also caution:

“[C]aring adults should remember that the teen brain is not fully developed. Teens may struggle with impulse control and may be more likely to make decisions based on emotions than on logic. In addition, an adolescent’s thinking and decision-making processes may vary from day to day.”¹

Teens do not pay the taxes that support schools. They are still learning to manage small sums of money responsibly. Many have little understanding of the economic realities that govern school board decisions, and the consequences to district finances of a vote may evade them.

Finally, because they are dependent on others for the necessities of life—food, shelter, clothing, and education—teens are especially vulnerable to undue influence on their vote. Parents, coaches, community members, and teachers all are in a position to exert pressure on a teen to vote a certain way; their inexperience, dependency, and lack of cognitive maturity can leave them unable to vote in their own best interest. Not only would 16- and 17-year-old voters have the potential to vote contrary to their own interests, they also would have the ability to harm the interests of both younger children and their own peers.

I urge you to vote no on HB3012.

¹ “Cognitive Development.” HHS Office of Population Affairs. Accessed March 4, 2025. <https://opa.hhs.gov/adolescent-health/adolescent-development-explained/cognitive-development>.