



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

My name is Brooke Hill, and I am writing on behalf of Oregon AFSCME, Oregon's third largest labor union representing over 39,000 workers in private and public sectors. We are part of a broad coalition that has the support of over 30 organizations. I am testifying 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 real voice in the political process and strengthening our democracy.

Many students care deeply about their education, but they don't have a say in ensuring school boards are responsive to the needs of all students. The Student Voice and Democracy Act will amplify the voices of thousands of students and keep decision-makers accountable.

AFSCME is voicing strong support for HB 3012 because we believe that expanding voting access is a step in the right direction in strengthening Oregon's democracy. Oregon is a national leader in safe, secure, and equitable voting practices. Allowing high school seniors to participate in the voting process prepares them for real life, and allows them input in decisions that affect them and their communities. Being politically active in high school is also a significant indicator of continuing to vote into adulthood. Establishing the practice of voting in high school allows students to learn how to engage in the process before they transition into college or the workforce after high school. School boards directly affect the lives of students every day. Allowing them to influence these decisions will make them more active members in their communities, and will also hold school board members accountable to the students they actually represent.

At 16, students can drive, be tried as adults in court, work, and make personal medical decisions. They are affected by local political issues as much as anyone, especially when it comes to their schools. Students are the primary recipients of the services provided by the school. Their experiences, needs, and concerns should inform district policy and the priorities of school board members. Students engaged in their education have higher attendance and graduation rates and are likelier to attend college or technical schools. School board members shape students' lives.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue. The Student Voice and Democracy Act fulfills the promise of our democracy while giving students a voice in our community. Including young voices in the voting process promotes not only increased voter participation, but also active engagement with local politics. AFSCME, in coalition with dozens of partner organizations, urges your strong support for HB 3012.

Sincerely,
Brooke Hill
AFSCME Political Team