



3.4.25

Dear Oregon Legislators,

Opposition to HB 3012: Lowering the Voting Age to 16 for School Board Elections

I strongly oppose **House Bill 3012**, which seeks to lower the voting age to 16 for school board elections. While engaging young people in civic participation is important, this bill presents **serious concerns** regarding **financial costs, developmental appropriateness, and electoral integrity** that make it a **misguided policy choice**.

1. Increased Costs to Taxpayers

Lowering the voting age to 16 would require **significant administrative expenses** to update voter rolls, revise election materials, and educate younger voters on their new rights and responsibilities. Oregon's elections are already complex and costly, and adding a new demographic would place an **additional financial burden on counties** that administer elections. Furthermore, the logistical challenges of integrating younger voters—many of whom lack standard forms of ID or established addresses—would **increase administrative costs** without clear benefits.

2. Developmental Concerns: Cognitive and Emotional Readiness

Scientific research shows that **brain development, particularly in areas responsible for impulse control, critical thinking, and long-term planning, continues into the mid-20s**. The **prefrontal cortex**, which governs decision-making and rational judgment, is still developing at age 16. While teenagers are certainly capable of forming opinions, they are also more susceptible to **peer pressure, emotional decision-making, and ideological influence** from parents, teachers, and social media.

Voting is a **serious civic responsibility**, and there is **no compelling evidence** that 16-year-olds, on average, possess the **maturity, life experience, or financial independence** to make informed decisions about school board governance, budgets, and policies that impact entire communities.

3. Risk of Special Interest Influence and Electoral Integrity

Allowing 16-year-olds to vote in school board elections opens the door to **increased influence from special interest groups, unions, and politically motivated organizations**. High school students—who are actively enrolled in the very schools affected by board decisions—could be **pressured by teachers, administrators, or advocacy groups** to vote a certain way, leading to conflicts of interest.

Additionally, expanding voting rights to minors could create **legal and logistical complications**, such as:

- **Parental involvement:** Could parents exert undue influence or even vote on their child's behalf?
- **Election security:** Would minors be subject to the same voter ID and registration requirements as adults?

4. A Slippery Slope with Broader Implications

If 16-year-olds are deemed mature enough to vote in school board elections, what prevents the next legislative push from allowing them to vote in **city, county, or even state and federal elections**? This bill sets a **dangerous precedent** for lowering the voting age across all levels of government, despite the fact that **Oregon law does not recognize 16-year-olds as adults** in other serious matters, such as signing legal contracts, serving on juries, or making independent medical decisions without parental consent.

Conclusion: Keep the Voting Age at 18

There is **no compelling need** to lower the voting age for school board elections. The current age of **18 is already aligned with other civic responsibilities**, including voting in general elections, serving in the military, and signing legal agreements. Rather than altering our electoral system in a way that creates costs, risks, and unintended consequences, we should focus on **educating young people about civic engagement** so that they are well-prepared to vote at 18.

For these reasons, I urge lawmakers to **reject HB 3012** and uphold the **integrity, maturity, and responsibility required for voting in school board elections**.

Thank you,

Walt Davenport