

Submitter: Britney VanCitters
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3012

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

My name is Britney VanCitters, and I live in SE Portland. I am writing to testify 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 critical voice in their education thereby strengthening our democracy.

I have had the opportunity and privilege to work with intelligent, talented, and motivated young people in my job as an environmental organizer. In my conversations with them, they ask smart questions, they've done the research, and they want to make a real difference for their community. I've watched these young folks effectively share their stories about how climate change has impacted them, their families, and their communities, and then make a pitch for a call to action. I've been incredibly impressed by them, and proud to watch them thrive as they grow into young adulthood and lifetime climate advocates.

Thinking about the lasting impacts that young people will continue to deal with, long after the generations before them— both in terms of climate change and otherwise— 16- and 17-year-olds deserve to have a say in the decisions that impact them most. There is no better way to ensure that young people's voices are heard when it comes to local policymaking than giving them the right to vote in local school board elections.

16- and 17-year-olds work and pay taxes on their income, can drive, and can in some cases be tried as adults in court. Not only do they deserve real representation, but research shows that 16-year-olds have requisite civic knowledge and skills, and have the mental reasoning ability necessary to make informed choices.

HB 3012 is also important to me because it creates new, educated, and engaged voters for the long term. Democracy works best when more people are able to participate and feel like they have a real impact in their community. If someone votes in the first election they are eligible for, they are likely to become a habitual voter and keep voting in future elections. If someone does not vote in the first election they are eligible for, they are likely to become a habitual non-voter for the next several elections. Data shows that voting in one election increases the probability of voting in the next election by up to 50 percent.

Thank you for considering my comments, and I urge you to vote yes on HB 3012.

Thank you,
Britney VanCitters
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