

Submitter: Meg Bender-Stephanski  
On Behalf Of: Let Students Vote  
Committee: House Committee On Rules  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3012

I am writing to testify in strong support of the Student Voice and Democracy Act, HB 3012, which will allow eligible and registered 16 and 17 year olds to vote in nonpartisan local school board elections starting in 2029, giving students a critical voice in their education thereby strengthening our democracy.

Oregon students deserve to have their voices heard and concerns addressed in their schools. School boards make decisions that directly and significantly impact students' lives. Sixteen and 17 year olds deserve a voice in electing the leaders who shape their educational experience.

Students care deeply about their communities and giving them an active voice in their education is a positive investment in their academic success and development as a more civically engaged citizens. At age 16, students can legally drive, hold jobs, and contribute to our economic base by paying taxes. I strongly support prioritizing the opportunity for 16 and 17 year olds to be allowed to participate in our democracy.

HB 3012 will support Oregon students by:

- applying the required civics education class (now taught in all Oregon high schools) through a relevant and impactful civic engagement opportunity
- bringing them to the table in a meaningful way to discuss priorities and solutions in their educational environment
- preparing them to become lifelong voters engaged in our democracy

A 2010 study, "American Sixteen- and Seventeen-Year-Olds Are Ready to Vote," by The American Academy of Political and Social Science confirms that students aged 16 and 17 have the same civic education, political skills, and interests as their 18 year old classmates, who can vote.

Voting is a behavior that relies on a thought process that is sometimes called "cold cognition" – a slow, deliberate, thought-out decision-making process. This is the opposite of "hot cognition" – the high pressure, impulsive decision-making process. It is true that 16-year-olds are not as good as older adults at hot cognition, but they are just as good as older young adults at cold cognition.

Twelve jurisdictions across the United States allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote in elections. Additionally, 19 states allow 17 year olds to vote in primary elections thus demonstrating that this age bracket is well equipped to vote in local school board elections.

I urge you to support the Student Voice and Democracy Act, HB 3012, and pass it out of committee.