Support House Bill 3012
House Committee on Rules
March 4th, 2025

Chair Bowman, Vice-Chairs Drazen and Pham, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Natalie Gordon and I am the Collaboration Coordinator at Prevent Child Abuse Oregon (PCAO), a statewide nonprofit dedicated to child and family wellbeing through community-based, comprehensive, primary prevention strategies. I respectfully submit this testimony in support of HB 3012 - the Student Voice and Democracy Act. HB 3012 will help strengthen our democracy by empowering16 and 17-year-olds to cast a ballot in school district elections.

We have an opportunity to strengthen our democracy by giving students a voice in the decisions that directly impact their education. Students care deeply about their education and deserve the right to vote on issues that affect their educational experience, but in our current system, they do not have a say in ensuring school boards are responsive to the needs of all students. In 2021, the Oregon Legislature adopted Senate Bill 513 requiring students to earn 0.5 civics course credit to fulfill graduation requirements.[1] With this requirement in mind, I believe Oregon can further engage young people in forming a habit of lifetime engagement with their communities and systems. If HB 3012 is passed, 16 and 17-year-olds will be offered an opportunity to apply their mandatory lessons about civic engagement in a nonpartisan environment and learn about our democracy without added social pressures. The Student Voice and Democracy Act will amplify the voices of thousands of students.

Allowing 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in school board elections can logistically be done, *and has been done*. Many cities and states throughout our country[2], and many countries all over the world[3], are empowering their young people to vote on matters that affect them. Opponents of HB 3012 express doubts about whether people in these age groups are mature enough to vote. Research on adolescent brain development indicates that concerns about 16-year-olds lacking the decision-making ability to vote are unsupported.[4] In addition to these points, allowing 16 and 17-year-olds to vote is aligned with many other life transitions and invitations to engage in their communities that currently exist in Oregon: youth are allowed to register to serve in the US

[1] https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/standards/socialsciences/pages/social-science-legislation.aspx#:~:text=SB%20513%20High%20School%20Civics,current%208th%2Dgrade%20students)
[2] https://www.youthrights.org/issues/voting-age/voting-age-status-report/
[3] https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/voting-age-by-country
[4] https://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/the-cities-where-16-year-olds-can-vote

military at age 17 [5], donate blood [6], have a job and pay taxes.[7] Young people are already actively shaping national politics through impactful organizing movements. HB 3012 offers Oregon the opportunity to aid our youth in exploring the foundation of their civic leadership and the ability to participate in decision-making that directly affects their lives. Granting 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote in school board elections serves as a preventive measure against harm, enabling them to advocate for policies that promote their safety and well-being.

The Student Voice and Democracy Act fulfills the promise of our democracy while giving students a voice in our community. As a representative of PCAO, we ask that you please support HB 3012 and pass it out of committee.

Thank you,

Natalie Gordon

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[5] https://www.goarmy.com/army-life/basic-training
[6] FindLaw.com - Oregon Revised Statutes Domestic Relations § 109.670 - last updated January 01, 2023 | https://codes.findlaw.com/or/title-11-domestic-relations/or-rev-st-sect-109-670.html

[7] https://www.oregon.gov/boli/employers/pages/minor-workers.aspx#:~:text=Sixteen%2D%20and%2017%2Dyear%2D,school%20is%20not%20in%20session.