

Submitter: Nilani Maheswaran  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Rules  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3012

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

My name is Nilani Maheswaran. I am a high school student from Portland and a co-founder of Vote16 Oregon, a student-led movement working to expand voting rights in local elections. I am writing to testify in strong support of House Bill 3012, which would allow registered 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in school board elections.

My peers and I started Vote16Oregon a year ago because young people want to be engaged, and we're ready to engage today. Research also shows when students are engaged in their education, attendance and graduation rates increase. But right now, we're denied the engagement we desire- and our voices often go unheard by school boards.

I serve on my local Mayor's Youth Advisory Board and recently hosted a Youth Summit with 60 students. Many shared feeling powerless as school board decisions—like redistricting, program cuts, large class sizes, and understaffed counseling—negatively impacted them.

Students are the primary constituents of our school boards. We spend 7 hours every day at school. Yet, these critical needs still persist even when we need adults to take action the most. We want our schools to stand as united communities, and we want to work with our teachers and board members on the issues we care about. But that can't happen until we're given a seat at the table.

I'm an active citizen and advocate; I drive, work, and pay taxes. If students can take on these responsibilities, we can be entrusted with the right to vote too. By allowing youth to elect their representatives, this bill fulfills the promise of our democracy.

On behalf of my friends and classmates, I urge you to pass HB 3012 so we can show up to a learning environment that understands and addresses our needs every single day; and one that makes it clear our input in our own education is valuable and powerful.

Thank you.

Nilani Maheswaran  
Co-Founder & Director  
Vote16 Oregon