

To: Senate Rules Committee
From: Kate Titus, Common Cause Oregon
Re: First Time Voters (SB 1574)
Date: February 18, 2026

Common Cause

Common Cause is a nonpartisan organization that works for open, honest, accountable government. We are 1.5 million Americans – including roughly 30,000 Oregonians – working together to realize the unfinished promise of democracy.

Support for the First Time Voters Act

In these polarized times – no matter where each of us stands politically – we may have moments where we doubt the reasoning skills of some of our fellow voters. It's easy to convince ourselves that *we ourselves* are smart voters, while some others may not be fully equipped for this responsibility. ☺

Of course, there was a time when people argued that women weren't capable to vote... and a long and continuing history of excluding voters based on race... and at the country's founding, a belief that only a small group of white property owners were sufficiently capable to vote. *But as we've come to believe more fully in the democracy we profess, we've gradually expanded the franchise.*

True democracy involves broadly shared decision-making. To borrow a phrase from the disability rights movement: "Nothing about us without us." The more inclusive we can be, the more representative we are, the better and more equitable our decisions. That benefits all of us.

Now science indicates that by 16 years of age, our "cold" cognition has generally matured to adult levels. And in Oregon, 17-year-olds have already engaged in years of K-12 civics education, and many are driving, working, and paying taxes. There's no reason to deny this population a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Moreover, empowering first-time voters to vote in primaries is a way to strengthen life-long voting habits.

Common Cause stands on the side of democracy. The organization helped pass the 26th Amendment, that lowered the voting age to 18. **We urge your support for SB 1574** to allow registered 17-year-olds to participate in major party primaries if they will be 18 by the consecutive general election.