

Chair Rosenbaum, Members of the Committee, For the record, my name is Madeline Leonard. I am a student at Sunset High School. I strongly support HB-2988 because I believe that broader participation in democracy equals a better democracy. The biggest obstacle to voting for new voters, is simply being registered. Currently in Oregon, there are over 700,000 eligible but unregistered voters. HB-2988 attacks the problem of un-registered voters by supplying a convenient voter registration opportunity for all of the 20,000 16-year-olds who visit the DMV to get their driver's license every year.

I am currently 16 years old and recently went through the process of earning my driver's license and experienced one of my first interactions with a government agency, the DMV. It took a lot of work to get my license: over 30 hours of Oregon Drivers Education Center instructional classroom time, 12 hours of in-the-car drive lessons, and over 50 hours additional driving experience with my parents. In addition, there was extensive paperwork and time spent at the DMV. I had to provide items including proof of legal presence, proof of legal name, proof of address, proof of school enrollment, and for one of the first times in my life, I had to know my social security number. Even scheduling a drive test was an ordeal in itself.

My experience with the DMV is shared by 20,000 other Oregon 16-year-olds every year. Teens like myself going to the DMV to get their driver's license are taking the first steps to actively participate as adults in our society. There is no better time to get young people civically engaged than when they have taken the time to learn about the rules of the road and are enthusiastic about becoming more independent, law-abiding community members. Those hours spent in the ODEC classrooms, time spent practice driving with instructors, was all in an effort to foster life-long good driving habits, why not also develop good voting habits? Allowing 16-year-olds to register to vote when they are already taking a big step toward becoming an adult greatly increases their chances of becoming life-long voters. The Motor Voter act is great, but It could be far more effective. Even though we have 17 year old pre-registration, the majority of teens don't go into the DMV when they're 17 to apply for their licenses. By lowering the pre-registration age to 16 we can greatly increase the number of registered voters and engage a new generation of lifetime voters.

Speaking as a 16-year-old I can testify that just as I accepted my privilege to drive, I would also gladly and passionately accept my right and responsibility to be civically engaged, with the first step of registering to vote. For these reasons I ask the Senate Rules Committee for your support of Bill HB-2988. I'd also like to thank the committee for taking the time to review my letter of support for 16 Year Old Pre-Voter Registration. Thank you.