



March 13, 2013

Chair Garrett, Members of the Committee:

My name is Caitlin Baggott. I am the executive director of the Bus Project Foundation. Since 2005, we have dedicated ourselves to engaging the next generation in civic life in Oregon, and have helped more than 85,000 Oregonians register to vote. Our voter registration effort is non-partisan, and geographically we work statewide. In 2012, we helped voters in 14 counties register to vote.

This work has opened our eyes to the need to simplify voter registration processes in Oregon, and to clear new paths for eligible citizens to find their way to the ballot. We urge you to support all three bills in front of you today, because each one fills a specific gap or addresses a specific inefficiency in our current system.

Today, nearly half a million Oregonians under the age of 40 are eligible to vote but are not registered. Some may chock this problem up to the apathy or distraction of youth. But we owe it to ourselves to resist that easy dismissal of a major flaw in our public systems that has an impact today and into the future. Indeed, national surveys in multiple elections reveal that when young voters fail to register to vote the reason is often very simple: lack of information. They don't know how, when, or where to vote. Young voters are engaged and interested in civic life, but the system is too complex.

Oregon has always been one of the leading democracies in the nation, with high levels of civic participation and engagement shaping the unique character of the state. The next generation is the largest generation in state history. We need to educate them to be Oregonians. We owe it to Oregon to ensure that our next generation of voters are the kinds of engaged citizen leaders who made this state great. It starts with voting.

In front of your committee today are three bills that get us started.

First, HB 2988, 16 Year-Old Pre-Registration. Five years ago the Bus Project advocated to pass pre-registration for 17 year olds. Since then, thousands of 17 years olds have successfully pre-registered in high school classrooms and at the DMV. But over 20,000 16-year-olds get their driver's licenses at the DMV every year. This bill would allow them all to pre-register to vote in the same trip. This bill would likely have the most significant impact on young rural voters who are even more likely to need to get a drivers license when they turn 16 -- and less likely to be registered in an election cycle voter registration drive, since those efforts typically focus on more densely populated parts of the state.



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Second, HB 3175, Improving College Voter Registration. This is a simple and thoughtful bill that ensures students at college campuses across Oregon get the access to voter registration services that they need to get engaged in their local communities.

Finally HB 2017, makes a minor but critical fix to our online voter registration system. Currently, registered Oregon voters who do not have a state-issued driver license or ID card cannot use the online voter registration tool to update their party registration or change their addresses if they move. This particularly disadvantages people of color, who are less likely to possess state-issued ID but are guaranteed the same right to vote as every other Oregonian. Allowing those voters who have already proven their eligibility and taken the initiative to get registered to access the convenience of online voter registration just makes sense.

Thank you for including this letter of support for House Bills 2988, 3175, and 2107 in your consideration. We urge the committee to move these Bills forward for full consideration of the legislature this year.

Caitlin Baggott
Executive Director

Innovative Democracy for Our Generation

busprojectfoundation.org ★ 333 se second ave ★ portland, oregon 97214