

Chair Burdick, Vice Chair Ferrioli, members of the committee,

My name is Mikala Capage, and I am a 17 year old high school student from Portland, Oregon. I am here today to share my opinion and thoughts on SB802, and I am able to be here through the support and outreach of The Bus Project, an organization that promotes civil engagement of everyone in our state. I have been lucky to be able to engage with politics at my age, and I owe a lot of that to my parents, who value and support it. They fostered in me a desire to participate. I am very excited to vote when I turn 18, and I registered to vote two weeks after my 17th birthday. Yet, not every teenager in Oregon is growing up with the same education and engagement around politics that I have. But despite these differences, every Oregonian should have the same access to the ballot when it comes time to vote. Lack of registration is one barrier, and that is why I support SB802. This bill would make registration easier for young voters in the state.

A law passed in 2007 allows 17 year olds to preregister, a full year before they would be able to vote. While the passage of this bill was a step in the right direction, Oregon can do more. Lowering the age to 16 years old, in conjunction with the ability to register through the DMV, would make it easier for teenagers to register, since so many of us head to the DMV around that age. The systems for preregistration are in place; lowering the age one more year would provide a huge benefit to Oregon's youth population, while causing little strain on state systems.

There are lots of eligible voters in the state, that do not show up on election days, because they are unregistered. Whether the reason is lack of information, communication, or understanding around how to register, the results are the same. The voices of youth in the state are relatively unsampled, and unheard. Individuals ages 18-24 have unique viewpoints and opinions. Hearing their voices at the polls would be beneficial to our state as a whole. Furthermore, studies conducted in other states that have preregistration for 16 year olds, find that not only do they come back and vote once they turn 18, but they stay engaged in politics and keep voting.

I believe it is important that engaging in the world, and in politics, is the best way to learn, to influence, and to affect change. Participation in government from all Oregonians is beneficial to all Oregonians. I support SB802 because this bill helps make that possible. I am excited to enter the adult world when I leave high school and turn 18. I am excited to vote and engage in government. Although everybody my age may not have the same poignant interest, everybody deserves to have their voices heard when it's time for them to vote.

Thank you for your time.