



TO: Senate Rules Committee
FR: Nikki Fisher, Executive Director Oregon Bus Project
DA: March 6, 2017
Re: Support for Senate Bill 802

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

My name is Nikki Fisher and I am the Executive Director of the Oregon Bus Project. We are a nonpartisan organization focused on engaging young people in the democratic process by making it fun and accessible. The Bus drives votes, it drives leaders, and it drives change.

I am here today in support of Senate Bill 802, which would lower Oregon's voter pre-registration age from 17 to 16 years. Ten other states and the District of Columbia already allow 16 year-olds to pre-register to vote. In three of those states (Louisiana, Utah, and Maryland) the bill was either sponsored by or signed into law by a Republican, and the bills passed with bipartisan support. We believe democracy works best when more people can participate and we believe pre-registration is an issue that has impacts urban and rural voters alike.

A significant number of 16 year-olds are currently being left out of Oregon's Motor Voter system. According to the Oregon Department of Motor Vehicles, nearly 20,000 16 year-olds receive their driver's license every year. If these young people are not pre-registered at 16, they likely won't have another *qualifying* interaction until they are 24 years old when their license expires.

Sixty-one percent of those interactions are in counties outside of the Portland Metro area (defined as Washington, Clackamas, and Multnomah counties). We know that often times these young people are not being captured by voter registration drives especially in rural high schools. We want to be sure these students are being registered at the same rates as students in our urban schools.

We also know that pre-registration is the most effective way to boost youth voter turnout. Research shows that when young people are pre-registered to vote, turnout for voters ages 18-24 increases. A case study of the 2008 election in Florida, which is available on OLIS for your review, showed that pre-registration boosted turnout among young voters by an estimated 4.7 percentage points over other registrants.



Pre-registration via automatic registration or online registration is the most efficient way to register youth to vote - both in terms of cost and ease of processing (by some estimates automatic registration costs 3 cents versus 83 cents for paper registration card processing). Voter retention is also nearly as high for youth as it is for the general population. According to Project Vote, data shows that 83 percent of 18 year-olds remain at their current address for at least one year, which is only slightly lower than the overall average of 87 percent for the general public.

When Oregon first passed voter pre-registration for 17 year-olds in 2007, it was passed with nearly unanimous support in both chambers. Back then, the idea of allowing 17 year-olds to pre-register to vote on or after their 17th birthday was a non-partisan no-brainer. We believe that extending that privilege to 16 year-olds should be just as easy.

You're going to hear now from several high school students who are taking time out of their day today because they each care deeply about civic engagement and were excited for the opportunity to meet you and share their stories. I am confident that hearing from them will help you see why it's so important to start engaging youth in the voting process from a young age.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Nikki Fisher
Executive Director
The Oregon Bus Project