



**Testimony in Support of HB 2948**

March 16, 2017

House Committee on Rules

Chris Hewitt

Chair Williamson and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) in support of House Bill 2948, which would extend the privilege of voter pre-registration to 16 year-olds. ONA represents 15,000 nurses, nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists and nursing students in Oregon. ONA has a long history of supporting policies that increase civic engagement and the voice of nursing in public policy decisions.

Voter pre-registration for 16 year-olds (HB 2948) is one of those policies. This proposal increase Oregonians' access to the ballot and continue advance our state's robust continuing efforts to reduce barriers that prevent individuals from participating in the democratic process.

Beginning in 2007, Oregon has allowed 17 year-olds to pre-register to vote. Since 2015, this has included 17 year-olds who interact with the DMV and are automatically pre-registered to vote via the Motor Voter system. Currently, roughly 20,000 16 year-olds around the state go to the DMV to get their license for the first time, but are not being pre-registered to vote during this important interaction with the agency. These individuals will not have another qualifying contact with the DMV until they turn the age of 24, leaving thousands of youth behind.

Research shows that when young people engage in the democratic process, they are more likely to remain active, engaged voters into adulthood. According to a 2009 study, "Registering the Youth Through Voter Pre-Registration," in 2008 the election in Florida, pre-registered young voters turned out a rate 4.7 percent higher than their counterparts who registered after age 18.

Oregon's nurses understand the value of a strong and vigorous democratic process that allows all voters to engage and have a voice in our electoral system. A vital measure of a healthy and truly thriving community is the ability for individuals to take ownership in important governance decisions and pursue civic participation. Enabling the next generation of voters in our state to take a simple preliminary step toward ultimately joining our elections process is indeed both a worthy and sensible approach that will serve to further strengthen Oregon's democracy.

ONA urges your support for HB 2948.