

Ryan Smith
Co-Chair, Hillsboro Youth Advisory Council
April 9, 2019

RE: HB 2824

Dear State Legislators,

I can still remember the day I got accepted to the Hillsboro Youth Advisory Council. I remember the thrill of excitement as I picked up the phone and heard the news. I remember arriving at my first YAC meeting, picking up my new YAC T-shirt and watching, starry-eyed, as the mayor of Hillsboro casually stopped by to say a few words. YAC seemed full of endless excitement and boundless opportunity, and I was ready to be involved in every way I could.

The reality of YAC, however, exceeded my highest expectations. YAC has allowed me to be involved in many important, influential, and impactful activities, from running our own TEDx Youth Conference to simply volunteering in the community. YAC also provides a youth voice on City Council policy, and even develops our own policy ideas and initiatives. For example, through YAC I helped organize the Hillsboro Sustainable Shopping Initiative, an effort to eliminate single-use plastic bags in Hillsboro retailers and restaurants. Over the course of many months, we conducted extensive research, met with representatives of Hillsboro's business community, surveyed more than 1000 Hillsboro residents, and consulted with staff from Oregon cities that had enacted plastic bag reduction policies. We worked with the Hillsboro city government to turn our proposal into an ordinance, and in November of 2018, our Sustainable Shopping Initiative was passed unanimously by the Hillsboro City Council. This initiative has been incredibly exciting and fulfilling to work on, and it never would have been possible without YAC.

The most thrilling aspect of YAC, however, isn't tied to any particular initiative. Instead, it is the simple fact that, despite my position as a high school student, adults are willing to listen to my voice and my opinion; I am able to get involved in the political process and change my community for the better. It is for this reason that I urge your support of HB 2824, which would allow youth from across the state to gather and share their ideas, experiences and effort on a statewide council. I truly believe that establishing an Oregon Youth Council would not only positively affect the council members themselves, but also the state as a whole.

Sincerely,
Ryan Smith