

COURTNEY NERON
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 26



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Testimony in Support of HB 3012

March 3rd, 2025

Chair Bowman, Vice Chair Drazan and Pham, and members of the Rules Committee,

Thank you for reading my full testimony on **The Student Voice and Democracy Act**, HB 3012. This bill will allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in their local school board elections, giving students a voice in their education and strengthening our democracy.

Student voices matter – students’ experiences, needs, and concerns should inform district policies and school board priorities. 16- and 17-year-olds are thoughtful and deeply care about their communities. Many are active and eager to have their voices heard.

Oregon has made significant strides in offering **civics education**. In 2021, we passed **Senate Bill 513**, requiring students to complete at least half a credit of civics to graduate, and **Senate Bill 702**, which emphasizes civics education, including voting rights, how to vote, and local government roles. I would like to congratulate Grant High School on earning First Place in the Nationwide “We The People” 2024 Civics Competition. They are a shining example of young adults who are embracing opportunities to become increasingly civically engaged and informed.

Some may argue that 16-year-olds lack the brain development or reasoning skills to make informed choices. Opposition testimony focusing on **prefrontal cortex development** (which is critical to “hot cognition” tasks) ignores that research actually shows that 16-year-olds are capable of deliberative tasks. Voting is what is called a “cold cognition task,”¹ a thoughtful, reasoned decision-making process that young adults are capable of at similar rates to adults.

And as a career **high school teacher**, I’ve seen how 16- and 17-year-olds excel at gathering information, engaging in meaningful conversations, and making informed

¹ Rachel Barken. (2021). Hot and Cold Cognition: Understanding Emerging Adults’ Cognitive Reasoning

<https://justicelab.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/Hot%20and%20Cold%20Cognition.pdf>

decisions - especially decisions that impact their lives directly. They may still be technically minors, but they are at a stage where they are **ready to take on new roles and responsibilities**.

This bill isn't about swaying elections but about encouraging civic engagement and providing **real-world civics education at a time when it is desperately needed**. I believe it's essential to teach youth the value of democracy and how to vote. 16 is **not** too young to make educated decisions, and **no one knows the needs of a school better than those who are directly involved**—educators, parents, and **students**.

Allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote for the people who make decisions about their school days will ensure that student voices are heard. It will also encourage early voting habits, helping young people understand that **their vote matters throughout their lives**.

Some teens **work** and **pay taxes** but don't have a say in their representation. Allowing them to vote for those who make decisions about school funding, school safety, and school leadership is a logical step forward in Oregon's election system.

Creating a culture of participation in democracy can start in high school. We need to do everything we can to **strengthen our democracy** and teach young people that their **participation is essential** for its success. **Healthy habits** formed early are more likely to last a lifetime.

I want to remind Oregonians who may have their doubts that this bill is just for school board representation in our state. And while entire countries (like Scotland, Brazil, and Austria) allow 16-year-olds to vote in **all** elections, I believe Oregon can benefit from taking a more **tailored approach to voting age**.

It's time to allow youth—who are already allowed to **drive, work, pay taxes², and dual-enroll in college**—to learn firsthand how to participate in voting for a board that shapes their school days.

I urge your support of HB 3012, The Student Voice and Democracy Act.

Sincerely,



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<https://www.civiced.org/release-2024-national-champions>
Release: Portland's Grant High School Places First in Center for Civic Education's Nationwide Competition on the Constitution - [civiced.org](https://www.civiced.org)