

Hello,

Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony. I am writing today in favor of LD 1051 "An Act To Promote Civic Engagement and Voter Participation for Young People by Lowering the Voting Age for Municipal Elections to 16 Years of Age." Simply put, young people in our communities are prepared to vote and deserve their opportunity to participate in the democratic process.

My name is Matt Bernstein and I am a social studies teacher in Portland. In this work, I see first hand the analytical and critical thinking skills that students possess. I have seen them unpack the nuances and complexities of challenging decisions countless times. Essentially, on a daily basis, I witness students practicing the skills that voters need. There is no doubt in my mind that 16 and 17 year olds are prepared to be voters. Furthermore, by creating this voting opportunity, we will be encouraging future generations of voters and allowing students to develop their civics education. In short, this bill will have a positive impact in the present and future.

Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, 16 and 17 year olds are directly impacted by city policies and, in particular, school board decisions. They deserve a say in determining who will be making these decisions. I find that most debates about the voting age center on how well prepared young folks are to be voters. I admit that, as evidenced by my paragraph above, this is where my mind instantly goes when the question comes up and I reiterate that I have no doubt as to the preparedness of young voters. However, in addition to that, I would argue that we are asking an incomplete question. It is not only for us to wonder if 16 and 17 year olds are ready for the vote, but also to ask what the consequences are of their continued disenfranchisement. We know that city policies have a direct impact on young people, many of whom are in the work force and paying taxes. Furthermore, I would argue that school board policies impact students more than any other group. Decisions are being made that determine a great deal of what a young person's experience is like, both in the day to day and in the long term. Therefore, when we deny young people the vote, we are taking away their opportunity to participate in shaping what their home and what their education will look like. This is not right and is, in many ways, counter to democratic principles that we hold dear. I am thrilled to see that this bill aims to promote civic engagement and, in so doing, expands the opportunity for democracy. I fully support LD 1051 and hope that you will all do the same.

Thank you for your time.

All the best,
Matt Bernstein
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