

Hello, I'm Zofia Dostal from District 33, and I am a graduate of the North Dakota public school system. I am here to testify on how the lack of a voting policy in our public schools has made it difficult, if not impossible, for many eligible voters to participate in federal and local elections, leaving many voices unheard.

During my time at Beulah High School, I remember feeling this sense of hope and pride in the opportunity to participate in our fine democracy. This pride quickly soured into disappointment as I witnessed many upperclassmen give up their opportunity to vote in the 2020 election because they were stuck in class and did not want to risk being counted as absent. While I was lucky enough to vote by mail in my first election just this last November, I recognize that this is not the reality for many young adults.

With each election cycle, a new generation of voices emerges, and the passing of this bill would ensure that these voices are heard. This bill would help to remove barriers that could restrict many high school students from making it to the polls when they may not have been able to make it otherwise. It may also encourage a lot of high schoolers to take their civic duty more seriously by emphasizing the importance of their participation.

Some may argue that HB 1178 is unnecessary because students have time outside of class to go to the polls, but this argument does not take into consideration the extra-curricular activities and after-school jobs that a majority of students take on, not to mention the homework they are assigned. There are also factors such as a lack of transportation that may hinder some students from making it to the polls. This bill would provide these students with an equal opportunity to exercise their constitutional right.

Studies have also shown that those who vote early in their life are more likely to continue voting as they grow. By allowing students time to go to the polls, it may help them build a life-long habit of civic engagement.

This bill is an important step toward ensuring that all eligible students have an equal opportunity to participate in our democracy. By providing students the time they need to vote, we remove barriers that currently prevent many young people from exercising their constitutional right. Not only will this bill give students the chance to make their voices heard, but it will also help cultivate a lifelong habit of civic engagement, encouraging future generations to take their civic responsibilities seriously. I urge you to support this bill, as it will strengthen our democracy by empowering young voters and ensuring that no voice is left unheard. Thank you for your time and your consideration.