

Thank you very much for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding House Bill 2824. My name is Myra Forester and I am a YouthLine volunteer. As someone who talks to peers not only in day-to-day life but also on the lines, I believe that the Oregon Youth Counsel would help to bridge the gap between those who intimately understand and personally experience the issues we face today as youth and those who are in a position to make changes accordingly. Anything that encourages youth involvement is a step in the right direction.

The opportunity to collaborate with peers on real-life issues has the potential to not only improve the laws that affect us but improve our ability to work together as we will need to do more and more if there is any hope of solving the myriad problems that affect us all.

While it is likely that every generation of youth feels misunderstood and underrepresented, Oregon youth are fortunate that our Legislature recognizes this disconnect and that our generation may have this unique opportunity to have a voice in policy matters that directly affect us.

Because we live it every day, teens are in the best position to share ideas that are relevant to our educational experiences (from curricula to school safety), youth violence (as well as violence against youth), youth mental health (ensuring that we are informed as well as supported), the environment (because we'd like to have a future), and civic engagement (allowing for a genuine and meaningful opportunity for our perspectives to make a difference).

I know from personal experience how one or two voices aren't *really* heard. But, perhaps, youth would be inspired to participate in the legislative process if their lone voice did not fall on deaf ears... because that one voice was with 29 other voices. Thank you.