

Hello, my name is Cadence Natividad, and I am a Garrett County Student Member on the Board of Education. I am here today to represent the youth of Garrett County.

I am connected to HB0052, which would authorize the General Assembly to allow counties to lower the voting age for members of an elected county board of education to 16 years old. This bill directly impacts my peers and me, as it gives us a voice in the decisions that shape our schools and communities.

Across the state, decisions made by the Board of Education affect our daily lives—our classrooms, extracurricular opportunities, and access to mental health resources. Yet, the very people most affected by these decisions often have no voice in electing those who make them. This bill seeks to change that by empowering students aged 16 and older to have a say in the future of our education.

I fully support this bill because I believe it would help ensure that student's voices are heard when it comes to shaping our schools and the policies that impact us. Moreover, it would encourage candidates to appeal to voters—students—and those who are directly affected by the decisions made by the Board of Education. As a student member, I have seen firsthand how engaged and informed my peers are about the issues that impact us. We care deeply about our education and our communities.

Allowing 16-year-olds to vote in Board of Education elections recognizes that young people are not just future leaders—they are leaders right now. Voting gives us a seat at the table and a chance to have our voices heard. It also fosters a sense of responsibility and civic engagement that can last a lifetime. When we start voting young, we are more likely to stay involved in shaping our communities as adults.

This bill is not just about changing voting eligibility; it is about strengthening democracy by bringing new energy, perspectives, and ideas to the decision-making process. I am testifying today because I believe that this is a meaningful opportunity to engage young people in the democratic process and to empower us to have a direct impact on the future of our education.

I urge you to support this bill, as it is an important step toward giving students a stronger voice in their education and fostering lifelong civic engagement. Thank you.