

# How to get kids excited about the election process



**Tristan Irvin**  
Willamette Connections  
Academy

It's another exciting campaign season here in Oregon.

This year, we have nearly forty candidates running for governor, and a new congressional seat needs filling. These are only two examples of the decisions Oregonians will make.

A couple of years ago, I ran for my local school board because I care deeply about education and wanted to continue being a community service role model for my three children. The entire family had many first-hand experiences with elections and all my kids got a front-row seat to democracy in action. It was incredible!

My high school son made sure his friends registered to vote, while my middle school daughter talked to teachers and parents about my campaign. My second grader stood in the front yard pointing to a sign, telling everyone who passed by to vote for me.

You don't have to run for office to show the students in your house how democracy works. There are other ways to assist your kids in understanding the election process.

## Back to basics

Electoral politics get complicated, so parents should start with the basics of our democratic system.

Try explaining the duties of the various elected officials. Clarifying the difference between school board members and state legislators will help your little one understand how various departments work.

Younger children can relate better if parents personalize topics. A tax levy to fund more playground equipment at the city park might be one example.

## Show and tell

Parents can do several things to show children how the elections system works.

As a child, I remember going to the voting booth with my parents to watch

**“During my school board race, our family had great dinner table conversations. Rather than lecture about public policy, children appreciate when you listen to their opinions. Parents may want to ask their kids questions like, “What did you think about the mayor’s debate?”**

them punch their ballots, thinking that was so cool! They always made it clear that voting shouldn't be taken for granted. Now with my three children, I remind them that every vote matters.

Have your kids watch you fill out your mail-in ballot. I keep the voters' pamphlet handy. Once the ballot is signed and sealed, ask your children to help deliver it to the post office or nearest election dropbox.

You can also give your kiddos instant voting privileges with a DIY election at home. Maybe your children want to vote on where the family's going for spring break, what to name the new puppy, or even what's for dinner.

Everyone in the family casts anonymous paper votes into a makeshift ballot box. The kids will love counting the ballots and announcing the results.

There are plenty of election message points to talk about with your students; they appear in yards, mailboxes, TV screens and phone calls in the spring.

Make it a family event to attend a local candidate or ballot measure debate, in person or virtually. Ask your children about the issues and see if your students have a favorite candidate. Watching election night results on TV is an exciting event for kids, young and old.

## Campaign conversations

My parents always discussed the upcoming election and which candidates they were supporting. I have car-

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## Staff

**News Director**  
Don Currie  
503-399-6655  
dcurrie@statesmanjournal.com

**Advertising**  
Westsmb@gannett.com

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ried that tradition forward with my kids so we can compare candidates and measures.

During my school board race, our family had great dinner table conversations. Rather than lecture about public policy, children appreciate when you listen to their opinions. Parents may want to ask their kids questions like, “What did you think about the mayor’s debate?”

Parents should share what's important to them this election year, but also tell your children it's okay to have different perspectives.

If we help our kids become critical thinkers who ask questions to better understand others, we'll have future voters that will protect and improve our democratic system. We can also stress the importance of the right to vote and ensuring everyone has access to the process.

## Rite of passage

For students celebrating their 18th birthday soon, I hope they learn how to register to vote before April 26, which is the voter registration deadline for

the May primary.

Parents can also share memories with their kids about that civic rite of passage into adulthood as a good way to talk about voting.

Think back to when you became 18 and cast your first ballot. I was at college in New York, but Oregon was my home, so I returned a mail-in ballot and remember feeling profoundly grateful for the opportunity to vote.

Fast-forward many decades to the school board election. My son turned 18 and the first ballot he ever cast had his mom's name on it – that's something neither of us will ever forget.

## Resources for families

- [icivics.org/election](https://www.icivics.org/election)
  - [icivics.org/family](https://www.icivics.org/family)
  - [pbs.org/parents/lets-vote](https://www.pbs.org/parents/lets-vote)
- Tristan Irvin is an elementary school teacher at Willamette Connections Academy. To learn more about Willamette Connections Academy, visit [WillametteConnectionsAcademy.com](https://www.WillametteConnectionsAcademy.com) or call 888-478-9474.*

# Hundreds of inmates could be retried under proposed bill

## Connor Radnovich

Salem Statesman Journal  
USA TODAY NETWORK

A bill that would allow individuals convicted by nonunanimous juries to appeal for post-conviction relief was limited by amendments in committee Monday in a rare display of bipartisan support around this contentious issue.

Three amendments added to Senate Bill 1511 limited the pool of who could apply for post-conviction relief within one year of the bill going into effect to those who are still in custody and excluded those who were convicted of a crime against a person under 18 years of age.

The latter of the amendments was proposed by Senate Republican Leader Tim Knopp, R-Bend, and praised by Democrats on the committee.

“This amendment helps me be more comfortable” supporting the bill, Sen. Sara Gelsler Blouin, D-Corvallis, said.

“I think (this amendment) is really important,” Sen. James Manning Jr., D-Eugene, said.

The amendment came out of concern from lawmakers and members of the public that children would be forced to re-testify about painful experiences.

The other amendment came from the committee itself. It proposes to:

- Limit who could apply for post-conviction relief to those still in custody and serving a sentence for conviction by a nonunanimous jury.
- Outlined the process for applying for relief.
- Directed \$6 million to the Department of Justice, district attorney offices and community-based organizations for providing support to crime victims.
- Increased the burden proof for establishing a verdict was nonunanimous from a “preponderance of evidence” to “clear and convincing” evidence.

The third amendment added to the bill was described as a technical fix.

## Concern about convictions

In 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that guilty verdicts by nonunanimous juries violate the U.S. Constitution.

At the time, Oregon was the only state to allow such verdicts. Jury decisions of 10-2 and 11-1 could result in conviction on all felony cases except for murder and aggravated murder.

When the decision came down, the verdicts of at least 370 Oregonians were put into various stages of review. That doesn't include any that could be impacted by SB 1511; the Supreme Court de-



Miniature State of Oregon flags are displayed in the Senate floor in the Capitol. BRIAN HAYES / STATESMAN JOURNAL

cision only applied to cases still on appeal. SB 1511 would apply retroactively. Potentially hundreds of cases could be appealed.

For that reason, the bill is still considered “terrible” by the Senate Republican office. It believes it creates an “unnecessary opportunity” for criminals to be released from prison.

Republican leadership has said the bill is part of a Democratic “pro-criminal” agenda this session. Those in support of the bill contend it is a matter of equity — not acting would leave convictions in place that are now considered unconstitutional.

But at least in committee, Republican senators thanked their Democratic colleagues for the changes to SB 1511, although they all voted “no” on moving the bill forward to the budget-writing Joint Ways and Means Committee.

“This bill is much improved by the amendments,” Sen. Kim Thatcher, R-Keizer, said.

Sen. Dennis Linthicum, R-Klamath Falls, voiced concern about the speed at which the bill was amended, and with relatively limited public input, but said he “very well may” support the bill on the floor.

“I love the fact that we moved from preponderance of evidence to clear and convincing. I think that is one of the best parts of it,” he said.

## Compromise doesn't satisfy all

The amendments did cause some consternation among supporters of the bill.

Aliza Kaplan, director of the Criminal Justice Reform Clinic at Lewis & Clark Law School, testified in support of SB

1511 during public hearings earlier this month. In an interview Monday, Kaplan said she is now concerned about the bill excluding those convicted of a crime involving a person under the age of 18.

Kaplan said she understands how difficult it is to go back to old cases, for victims, attorneys and those convicted of the crime. But, she said, it feels like the Legislature is now cherry-picking who gets to have their constitutional rights restored.

“Everyone deserves some kind of relief, and that is not what this bill is,” Kaplan said. “Will it help a lot of people? I sure hope so.”

Reporter Connor Radnovich covers the Oregon Legislature and state government. Contact him at [cradnovich@statesmanjournal.com](mailto:cradnovich@statesmanjournal.com) or 503-399-6864, or follow him on Twitter at @CDRadnovich.