March 9, 2015

Dear Chair Hoyle and members of the House Rules Committee,

I would like to comment on **HB 2945**. This bill would add transparency of the registration and demographic data used in redistricting. I believe in this concept, but would support amending this bill to make the transparency of information more immediately available for the public.

In 2011, as a participant in a year-long City Club of Portland redistricting study, I observed the process carried out by the Joint Redistricting Committee. On the whole this process had strong leadership and went very well generating bipartisan redistricting agreements that ended up having no court challenges. In one area, however, I found the process to be lacking. There was a lack of transparency when it came to the actual data being used in the process. Legislators involved in the 2011 redistricting process testified to our research committee that party registration was one of their primary negotiation points during the process; unfortunately the public had no way to review or improve the specifics of these conversations. This became especially apparent when *Oregonian* reporter, Jeff Mapes, wrote a blog pointing out that Republicans and Democrats were using different data, or different interpretations of registration data, in their calculations as they considered redistricting. Meanwhile the public did not have access to this data making it difficult for outsiders to assess the implications of different redistricting possibilities.

Redistricting decisions are very consequential as they can affect the outcomes of political races for a decade. The redistricting process can be a highly charged and political process that can potentially arouse suspicions of political manipulation by one side or the other. For the process to be credible, it is vital that the data used, namely voter registration and other demographic data, be transparent and readily available to the public. In this "Information Age," I see no reason why this information should not be public.

As written HB 2945 allows the public to request and receive data used within 21 days. I would argue that, with modern information technology, this data should be made available in real time. This would be especially important if the public is to have adequate information to assess the proposed maps in the short window for comment after they come out, or to allow citizens to make informed attempts to create their own redistricting plans.

This kind of transparency could be advanced significantly if Oregon were to participate in the Block Boundary Census Program which would allow for census data to be more easily linked to precinct boundaries. According to a 2011 Common Cause report, Oregon is one of only three states that did not participate in this program in 2010. This alone could make registration and demographic data used for redistricting cheaper and more easily available to all. Ideally, staff of future legislative redistricting committees would link the political data with precinct boundary information so that it is public record and available for anyone to analyze the political dynamics of draft redistricting plans.

I believe that an amended HB 2945 will ensure this greater level of transparency in the redistricting process and will substantially improve the quality of the final product.

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