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## **AARP Oregon Testimony on HB 4076 - Small Donor Elections**

February 8, 2018

To: House Committee on Rules, Jennifer Williamson, Chair

FROM: Steve Carter, Appointed Volunteer, AARP Oregon

Good Afternoon, Chair Williamson and members of the Rules Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I am Steve Carter, a volunteer with AARP Oregon, and I am here to urge your support of House Bill 4076, legislation to establish small donor elections for the Oregon Legislature.

As a longtime reporter and editor – now retired – at The Oregonian, I have been frustrated at the escalating cost of running a viable campaign for state senator or representative. When a campaign for legislative office can run upwards of \$400,000 or more, it means that many everyday Oregonians who want to serve are shut out of the process.

AARP Oregon backs small donor elections legislation because it aligns closely with goals we believe in: Increased civic engagement and greater trust in government. AARP believes a critical tenet of democracy is civic engagement, and small donor elections elsewhere have shown that this system increases campaign participation. People who might believe their \$20 or \$30 donation wouldn't amount to much in an expensive campaign become excited when their donation is matched on a six-to-one basis. Studies have shown that small donor elections have the capacity to get more people volunteering for political campaigns because they can see a pathway to victory.

Small donor elections also encourage more candidates to run for office, because they see they can raise enough money to run a viable campaign. And, it allows participating candidate to talk to many ordinary citizens because they must raise small donations from hundreds of individuals in order to qualify for the program. They also have the incentive to LISTEN to everyday Oregonians too – because these donations are magnified. That gives candidates the capacity to hear what's on the minds of everyday citizens – not just the concerns of special interests that write big checks.

AARP  
Real Possibilities

As our state becomes increasingly diverse, it's important that low-income residents and citizens of color have a place at the table. Small donor elections are one way to magnify the voices of all our citizens and create a better reflection of our diversity in the Legislature. Small donor elections have the support of a wide array of civic organization and groups representing our communities of color.

Small donor elections have the capacity to increase trust in government as well. At present, many people, including a majority of AARP members, believe government is more responsive to the concerns of special interests that can write big checks than to the concerns of ordinary citizens. If people believe their concerns are being addressed, they will have greater trust in government. Small donor elections can help in this regard.

Small donor elections have been in place in New York for decades, and they increasingly being created in a number of cities and state, including Seattle and Portland. It's time to bring this concept to Salem to enhance our democracy and give voice to all the people. AARP Oregon, with more than 500,000 members statewide, urges your support of small donor elections. Thank you, and thanks to Rep. Dan Rayfield for sponsoring this bill.