



March 11, 2019

TO: Senate Majority Leader Ginny Burdick, Chair
Senate Committee on Rules
FR: Esther Harlow and Bob Joondeph, Disability Rights Oregon
RE: Supporting SB 861

Oregon has been a pioneer with modernizing voting systems. Our vote by mail system eliminated many of the polling place access issues that plague other states, where voters face polling places that are not compliant with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act and are unable to get into a voting booth.

However, all of the barriers have not been eliminated. Voters have the option to mail their ballot or return it to a ballot box. Both of these have barriers that decrease the chances a registered voter with disabilities will make their voice heard.

Mailing a ballot requires a stamp which many people with disabilities do not have: they may be living in poverty, which Americans with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be. Or they may be receiving assistance from a family member, guardian, payee, or other representative who otherwise handles their bills and correspondence on their behalf. My own family members who have disabilities have support staff and payees who do these things for them. The Help America Vote Act says that voters with disabilities have the same rights to privacy and independence in voting that everyone else has. A voter should not have to wait for someone else to assist them getting a stamp. They should be able to privately mark their ballot, and put it back in the mailbox in front of their home, without waiting for assistance or intervention that compromises the security of their ballot.

Turning a ballot into a ballot box, while free, requires transportation to get to the ballot box. Even in urban areas like Portland, a simple Trimet LIFT trip can require many hours' commitment. In rural areas, transportation options are even more difficult. I (DRO?) also have concerns that some ballot boxes may not comply with ADA guidelines for polling place access, such as reach, path of travel and accessible routes. Offering the same return service from the voter's own home will eliminate concerns about getting to and using ballot boxes.

Some large print ballots used by voters with vision impairments require extra postage when there are many races. DRO has worked with individual clerks in the past to ensure that those ballots would have adequate postage so that there would not be any concerns about those ballots getting returned to sender. Paid postage would ensure these ballots would not fall through the cracks.

DRO supports SB 861 because it will eliminate one of the last barriers to voters with disabilities having access to turning in their ballot privately and independently.