



House Agriculture and Land Use Committee
haglu.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov

Re: HB 2958

Dear Committee Members:

This letter expresses the East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District's (EMSWCD's) support for the intent of, but concern with the language and effect of, HB 2958. The EMSWCD is unit of local government, led by an elected board of five directors, serving nearly 700,000 residents in Multnomah County east of the Willamette River. We work with constituents on a voluntary, non-regulatory basis to help them care for land and water.

Our understanding of the intent of HB 2958 is to remove barriers to representation on the boards of soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) for historically underserved groups in Oregon, particularly those groups who have been directly or indirectly denied land ownership and management opportunities. We applaud this intent and have long since wanted to see improvement along these lines, especially in districts such as ours that are densely populated. However, the current language of HB 2958 may have the opposite effect as it will remove all requirements for geographic representation.

As written, it appears that HB 2958 will only require zone directors to be registered voters and to live within the district (as opposed to the zone). This, in effect, will abolish zone directors all together as the "zone" directors will no longer have to live or work within the zone they represent. We think this is unwise and potentially counter-productive to the intent as it could result in all SWCD directors (both at-large and zone) coming from the same geographic area within the district and functionally representing the same constituents.

We suggest the language be changed to require zone directors in districts with county populations equal to or greater than 50,000 to: 1) live or work within the zone they represent, and 2) be registered voters within the district.

While we have concerns about: 1) the threshold determination (i.e., gross population versus density), 2) doing away completely with any soil and water-related management experience, and 3) the application of associate director service to meet zone director eligibility requirements, we have not had sufficient time to formulate agreed-upon alternatives to the draft language. We would welcome the opportunity to work more closely with the Committee and others to improve the entirety of HB 2958.

Please let me know if you would like further information.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

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