



The League of Women Voters of Oregon is a 99-year-old grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We envision informed Oregonians participating in a fully accessible, responsive, and transparent government to achieve the common good. LWVOR Legislative Action is based on advocacy positions formed through studies and member consensus. The League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party.

March 15, 2019

To: Senate Committee on Rules Committee
Senator Ginny Burdick, Chair

Re: SB 755 – Related to funding the Citizens’ Initiative Review Commission – Support

The League of Women Voters strongly supports SB 755, based on our position that a democratic government depends upon the informed and active participation of its citizens. We believe that the Citizens’ Initiative Review (CIR) process, under the direction of the Citizens’ Initiative Review Commission, is the embodiment of this fundamental right. The League has supported and closely monitored the CIR process since 2011, when the Citizens’ Initiative Review Commission was first established. We have seen firsthand that the Commission has more than accomplished what it set out to do – set up a rigorous and fair process to give diverse groups of everyday citizens the opportunity to evaluate ballot measures and become intimately involved in the democratic process. Initially the Commission was funded through short term foundation grants, but we hope you will agree that a stable, long-term funding source for the Commission is worthy of your consideration.

First, we believe that the CIR process fits with Governor Brown’s budget priority to “renew and strengthen Oregonian’s faith in democracy.” It is an antidote to the excessive money pouring into ballot measure campaigns from vested interests and the divisive “sound bite” strategies that mislead and simplify complex issues. Imagine if we could bring a diverse group of citizens together who could take the time to delve deeply into the facts about a ballot measure, wade through the pros and cons, hear from impartial experts, and share what they have learned with the rest of us before we cast our ballots. Now imagine if the findings of this group resulted in voters making more informed decisions on ballot measures that often have profound effects on the state budget. The mechanism for doing this is already in place, it is thoroughly vetted by academic experts, and it works beautifully. Those who have participated in or observed a CIR come away with a renewed faith in democracy when they see the power of engaged citizens becoming truly invested in the decision-making process.

Secondly, the CIR has gained an outstanding reputation in the field of participatory democracy, as you will hear more about today. It is known as the “Oregon Model” around the world. In the United States, CIRs have been held in California, Arizona, Colorado, and Massachusetts, and in fact, Massachusetts is now on track to adopt it into statute and publicly fund it. Yet in Oregon, where the CIR originated, a lack of ongoing funding puts this unique process in serious jeopardy of disappearing entirely from its home state. We ask you not to let this happen.

Oregonians can be justly proud of our vote by mail and automatic voter registration laws that make our voting rates the envy of other states, and it makes sense to add public funding of the Citizens’ Initiative Review Commission to the list of what makes Oregon special. It is vital that the Commission serve the public interest and be independent from corporations, unions, or other entities with their own agendas. The League urges a yes vote on SB 755. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation.

Norman Turrill
LWVOR President

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LWVOR Action Committee