



Oregon's Farmworker Union

April 15, 2019

Dear Chair Holvey, Vice Chair Williamson, Vice-Chair Wilson and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of our 6,543 members, PCUN would like to express strong support for the Oregon Voting Rights Act, House Bill 3310.

The Oregon Voting Rights Act enshrines the spirit of the National Voting Rights in Oregon law by creating a community driven process for school districts, education service districts and community college board to align electoral structures with the National Voting Rights Act. We are enthusiastically supportive of continuing to build a democracy that is accessible and equitable to all, especially for communities who have often been marginalized.

The growing Latinx electorate, and population is integral to both our state's and the nation's democracy and the future of our civic engagement systems, but because of long-standing inequities, our communities are oftentimes not represented in elected decision-making bodies.

We strongly believe that communities should be able to elect a representative/candidate of their choice and work within an electoral structure that makes it easier for that community to elect that candidate.

In 2017, Levi Herrera Lopez ran to represent Zone 5 in the Salem-Keizer School district, one of the most diverse zones in the district. Salem-Keizer is the second largest school district in the State of Oregon, where students of color make up 50% of the student population—40% of these are Latino students¹. Despite the growing diverse student body, Salem-Keizer school board has only had one person of color represent our students in all of its history.

Levi had served in numerous city and school committees, he had lived in the zone for more than 15 years, and professionally, led a non-profit that provided social services to the community. Despite Levi's shared experiences, values and understanding of the community he came from, and a community driven campaign, Levi was not elected to the school board.

Levi's story points to a particular outdated electoral system that makes it challenging for folks to even want to run in that specific district. Salem-keizer school races are run at-large. This means that while he filed for his zone, everyone in the district had the choice to vote for him. In a district with more than 100k voters, it is impossible to knock every door and would require large amounts of money to get his message through direct mail. This is simply not realistic and discourages qualified folks to run.

Oregon's school districts use outdated at-large voting systems to decide local school board elections. This allows the same majority of voters to decide the result for every school board seat in a town,

¹ Salem-Keizer Public Schools. "Our Districts: By the numbers".(January 2019).

cities, or counties. As a result, some communities do not have a fair chance to elect candidates of their choice, who will advocate for their needs in local government.

HB 3310 promotes healthy democracy by making sure that elected officials come from the communities they represent. HB 3310 does not create new electoral requirements beyond the federal voting rights act. Instead, it would institute a local, community driven process for school districts to work collaboratively with community to address electoral structures that may not be inclusive.

HB 3310 recognizes that every local community is different. While the above example points to an at-large system, HB 3310 does not mandate any particular voting system, instead it offers a fair and collaborative process for changing outdated election systems. If we make voting less complicated and each jurisdiction's voting system appropriate to the community, our government remains of, by, and for the people.

PCUN respectfully requests the committee to support HB 3310.

Thank you,
Martha Sonato
Political Director, PCUN