



March 4, 2021

To: The House Rules Committee

From: Michele Ruffin, Oregon Political Director, Forward Together Action

Re: Support of HB 2745, Voter Access Act

Dear Chair Smith Warner, Vice-Chairs Drazan and Holvey and Members of the Committee,

My name is Michele Ruffin and I am the political director of Forward Together Action, a multi-issue organization working with Black, Indigenous, Women of Color and Non-Binary people to push for the systems change we need for all families to thrive. I'm testifying today on behalf of my organization's full support of a bill that would make for a more inclusive future for Oregon voters and therefore, a stronger democracy for our state.

For the families our organization works with, the political process is often confusing and the process of voting is not straightforward or accessible across all communities. We spend a lot of time and resources in deeper conversation with our base members and volunteers about what the voting process is like for them and how to make it better. We also collect demographic information during our organizing--- whether at events to sign folks in, an online survey to find out what matters most or when someone signs a pledge to vote--- **we do this because we value what that submission means: our communities matter, we are here, always have been and always will be.**

Collection of demographic data such as race, ethnicity, and language is critical--- we can draw from the most recent example of the 2020 census and see how incredible it was to have community-based, culturally-specific and trusted organizations like ours doing the outreach needed in the midst of uncertainty about the process and an unfriendly national environment to communities of color and undocumented folks. What we saw



was that through these efforts there was higher response rates and an overall better count. In voting, I would make a similar argument, that the process is only as strong as the community infrastructure that surrounds it. That's why when I think about the opportunity that lies before us with HB 2745, I think about all the mamas and families whose doors we've knocked, those who stayed on the phone to get help on their ballots and those who reached out after they registered to vote. HB 2745 would allow Oregon voters, both new and those updating their registration, to mark race, ethnicity and language preference if they so choose. It makes me think about the kind of future we seek where we can say that for those who self-identify their demographic information that we see them and seek better solutions for their participation in our voting process.

We believe that HB 2745 will strengthen Oregon's Motor Voter law, equip our state with a tool to address voter disparities and empower more community-led organizations to connect to voters in a deeper and more meaningful way. These are simple actions we can take to make our elections more accessible for every voting Oregonian.

For these reasons and for a better future in our state, I urge you to vote yes on HB 2745. Thank you for your consideration and time today.

Sincerely,

Michele Ruffin

Oregon Political Director

Forward Together Action