



March 4, 2021

To: The House Rules Committee

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

Re: Support of HB 3021, Language Access

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.**

One issue we regularly encounter in reaching voters of color are language barriers. We have hundreds of thousands of Oregonians that are considered Limited English Proficient (LEP). When we've done voter outreach we have encountered those who speak Vietnamese, Mandarin, Somali, Arabic, Lao, Tagalog, Spanish and a number of other languages. And although we could refer voters to a local resource such as Multnomah



County elections language access webpage¹, having a translated voters pamphlet, ballot and materials in front of them could go a long way. That's why HB 3021, with the dash 1 amendment is so important. By ensuring the Secretary of State's office can gather and make public the five most common languages spoken and then translate voters' pamphlets in those languages, we take a forward step in the right direction toward a more inclusive process. Ensuring adequate access to language materials in the languages voters understand is a key element of a fair, effective, and responsive election system in Oregon.

We believe that HB 3021 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 3021. Thank you for your consideration and time today.

Sincerely,
Michele Ruffin
Oregon Political Director
Forward Together Action

¹ <https://multco.us/VEOLang>