



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Testimony in Support for HB 2745 & 3021**

March 4, 2021

Chair Smith Warner, Vice Chairs Drazan and Holvey, and members of the committee,

My name is Khanh Pham, State Representative for HD 46. As the chief sponsor for these bills, I am honored to testify in support of both HB 2745 and HB 3021, two voter access bills included in the BIPOC Caucus Agenda to expand democracy to Oregonians left behind by a history of exclusionary policies.

As we've all championed through the BIPOC Caucus Agenda, *more* data about our communities to legislate racial equity, and *more* opportunity for BIPOC Oregonians to participate in democracy are at the *heart* of these two bills.

**HB 2745 – would enable voluntary self-identification by voters of their race, ethnicity, and preferred language on all paper & online voter registration.** Identification information provided would become public record. This bill would allow us to better protect the voting rights of BIPOC Oregonians and improve community outreach to BIPOC communities.

The State of Oregon is known for knocking down barriers that prevent voters from engaging in the political process. However, the state of Oregon is behind on collecting race and ethnicity data to address inequities in voting populations. If we did this, its effects could be monumental in two main ways:

1. It better enables community-led and culturally-specific organizations to engage more deeply with voters who self-identify their race and ethnicity and who want to connect to resources offered by these trusted community organizations.
2. It can ensure state and county elections offices have better data to address voting disparities in the future. Right now, because we do not collect this data, we do not have a clearer picture of how well voting populations across the state are served by the systems we have - whether it's in early voting, or identifying specific resources needed toward greater participation in elections.

As a legislature, we are working on several initiatives to get better data as a State in order to better serve Oregonians. We collect more race/ethnicity data in health care for better patient outcomes. We collect race/ethnicity data in education for better student outcomes. We are fighting for more race/ethnicity data in our Department of Revenue so taxpayers know their dollars are being spent wisely and targeted for greatest needs. We need to do the same for *voters* so they know our Oregon democracy is working for all, not just the privileged.

**HB 3021 with the dash-1 amendment** – requires the Secretary of State to **identify and make public the top 5 most commonly spoken languages (outside of English) in each county, and ensure the State and county voters’ pamphlet are translated into these languages and made available online for voters** to inform themselves of elections materials in their preferred language.

It is not new information to us that many voters encounter language barriers in the voting process.

More than 200,000 Oregonians in our state are considered Limited English Proficiency (LEP). And nearly 1 in 3 Asian Americans in our state are considered LEP.[1] Our Asian Pacific Islander population in Oregon is the fastest growing in recent years, and we as a state can do more to meet the needs and engage these voters in more meaningful ways, in the languages they speak.

According to census and American community survey data as recent as 2019, about 15.4% of households in our state speak a language other than English[2]. There is landmark precedent at the federal level for this type of language access included in this bill. Language minority provisions in the federal Voting Rights Act require some states to provide language assistance during elections, and this section has been reauthorized by Congress 5 times in 50 years since its creation.

**We know that the right to vote includes the right to understand what is being voted on.** English second language voters deserve the same amount of public transparency and access to our civic process. **I believe that a person’s desire to *understand*, and their desire to *be understood* should not be seen as a burden for the state, but something our state can and should provide to better our democracy.**

**In conclusion, we measure what we care about.** We legislators can craft better policy when we have more data to meet the specific needs of different communities. When we say we want to be more culturally responsive and create a more inclusive future--- **we must legislate our values.** Collecting data around race, ethnicity and language when it comes to our voting population allows our communities to be more visible, to have their stories seen by government. In addition, when we ensure it’s optional or voluntary, we don’t violate the principles of self-determination in that process.

I urge the committee to support bills HB 2745 and HB 3021, to restore Oregon to be on the “leading edge” of democracy with these proposals. Thank you!

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[1] <http://aapidata.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/OR-2018.pdf>

[2] <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/OR#>

[3] <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2020/why-race-specific-voter-turnout-data-is-a-challenge-to-collect/>