

Isabela Villarreal
333 SE 2nd Ave.
Portland, OR 97214
RE: Support HB 3291 -1



April 6, 2021

Chair Smith Warner, Vice-Chairs Drazan and Holvey, and Members of the House Committee on Rules,

My name is Isabela Villarreal, I use she/her pronouns, and I am the Policy & Communications Manager at Next Up Action Fund, formerly known as the Bus Project. Our mission is to build political power with diverse young people to achieve a more just and equitable Oregon. For the past 18 years, we have diligently improved upon our elections system so that all Oregonians can truly have their voices heard. Thus, we strongly support HB 3291 -1.

When we championed paid postage for ballots over many years, we alluded to the fact that the postmark deadline for ballots is a persistent issue. And when the pandemic hit, we raised the alarm that our beloved vote by mail system still needs improvements. There is now a sense of urgency to fixing the problem, as in both the pandemic primary and the general election we saw Oregonians repeatedly forced to choose between their vote and their health, risking their health to turn in their ballots. We saw underfunded elections systems with too few drop sites, and community members crowding streets by car and by foot, just to vote.

It doesn't have to be this way. Currently, ballots must be submitted before election day and with enough time to arrive at the elections office by election day. If closures and social distancing measures continue, we'll continue to have a 7-day gap where Oregonians need to drop off ballots but libraries and other drop sites are closed. This is a public health concern and a barrier to democracy.

Sure, we can and do encourage people to vote early. But that doesn't solve the problem. We spoke on February 11th about the importance of extending the postmark date through HB 2687, and we continue to support this effort now through HB 3291 with the -1. We know there are Oregonians who become non-voters and don't cast their ballots because they think they are too late to mail the ballot, and dropping off their ballots is a barrier due to mobility/transportation, lack of available dropbox locations, confusion over mailing deadlines. It's hard for us to quantify deterred votes, but we could eliminate this situation by clarifying the deadline by which ballots must be received.

This is a simple fix, and one that our neighbors in Washington state already enjoy. At Next Up Action Fund, we are dead set on Oregon remaining the #1 easiest state to vote in, and we hope that you are too. Please pass HB 3291 with the -1 to the floor with a do pass recommendation as soon as possible so that our voting tradition can become even stronger.

Thank you,

Isabela Villarreal
Policy and Communications Manager, Next Up Action Fund