



The League of Women Voters of Oregon is a 101-year-old grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We envision informed Oregonians participating in a fully accessible, responsive, and transparent government to achieve the common good. LWVOR Legislative Action is based on advocacy positions formed through studies and member consensus. The League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party.

April 7, 2021

To: Co-Chairs, Senators [Jeff Golden](#) and [Greg Smith](#)
[Joint Subcommittee on General Governance](#)

Re: [SB 5538](#) – Agency Request Budget Secretary of State – **Comments in Support**

The League of Women Voters supports fair, transparent, and accessible elections and efficiency in government. Over the years, the League has collaborated with Secretaries of State (SoS) and staff and advocated on legislative issues relating to all of the Divisions. We have spoken to proposed agency budgets, for example supporting elections improvements for decades in Oregon. The League is proud of Oregon's position as a national leader with Vote-by-Mail, pre-paid ballot envelopes, Automatic Voter Registration, and laudable voter turnout. We support the vigor of this proposed budget and will speak to examples that serve elections, though these can apply to other divisions. We can speak at length to specifics on request and have added background information for the record.

[We urge for full elections software funding](#)

The League wants to highlight three software update needs for support: voter registration expansion, campaign filing software, and geospatial election districting improvements and reconciliation.

The League has updated our 2019 request to update campaign filing software to address specifics including defining appropriate campaign filing contact information, not using incumbent office information. Oregon voters need public transparency for all of Oregon's candidate filings, currently not visible directly for local candidate filings in OCVR. The League notes that the Elections Division has currently prioritized updating OCVR before ORESTAR. We urge your support for funding the anticipated software updates.

On October 26, 2018, the SoS Newsroom reported an "[ORESTAR Batch Transactions Processing Error](#)". The League called for replacing ORESTAR in 2019, [HB 2234](#), with [multiple testimonials on file](#).

When we discussed this with Director Trout at the time, he urged for not naming either OCVR, for local candidate filing, or ORESTAR, for state-wide candidate filing in the bill, since both were overdue for replacement.

We urge for fiscal support for proposed voter registration expansion, see [HB 2499](#).

The League has extensive experience working with election districting for our online Voters' Guide, [Vote411.org](#), where voters can enter their home address to see races that will be on their ballots. The Department of Revenue invited us to work on the Oregon Framework Implementation Team - Cadastral Theme Tax District Boundaries Work Group, for geospatial taxing district improvements based on the League's need for Elections Districting improvements. We have seen significant improvements and urge that you consider budget amendments to cover costs that may not be addressed in this budget.

[Executive Staffing](#)

The League appreciates the current increased citizen interest and participation in all aspects of governance. Much of the work done by the SoS Divisions lacks public visibility. There are compelling needs addressed here that call for a renewing vigor after numerous challenging transitions to this office. It

makes sense to centralize executive staff to increase coverage across divisions through cyclic calendar demand phases. We cannot speak to the specific FTE allocations but support the concepts, with examples here relating to elections.

- The effects of COVID and wildfires last year on many aspects of elections call for developing policy initiatives and long-term strategies. This is the kind of sound investment that the League position for preparedness supports.
- The League prioritizes diversity, equity, and inclusivity. We support tribal liaison for outreach to Oregon's tribal members, including extensive room for improvement with voting access.
- Social media strategy support is imperative to disseminate nimble, effective communication.
- Press and Public Information management need to be hefty enough to support Oregon's national elections leadership position, while fully engaging our voters here at home.
- We observe that the large volume of public service funneled through the Office of the Secretary is not widely understood. The League supports funding Executive and Logistics staff so these multiple functions run smoothly and don't become a bottleneck.
- The League supports Community Engagement and Outreach. The Oregon Department of Education Social Sciences has tasked the League preeminently for **teaching Oregon students how to vote**. We would welcome renewed coordination for the League's [Oregon Student Mock Elections \(OSME\)](#) buttressed by a free Civics Education curriculum. This was founded as a partnership, with large HAVA grant funding, contracting through the Secretary of State, winning numerous national awards for our program. About 20 years ago, we bussed hundreds of students to the Capitol from around Oregon, but OSME is mostly digital now.
- The League supports Legislative Policy funding based on a legacy of close working relationships with the Secretary's Legislative Directors, to address opportunities and challenges for both statute and rule revisions. The responsibilities falling to the Secretary for 2021 Redistricting considerations warrant further professional support.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation.



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Background We negotiated in 2017 for updates to allow ORESTAR filing online for all Oregon candidates. We got input from the Secretary of State Legislative Director, the Elections Division, the Oregon Association of County Clerks, the League of Oregon Cities, the Special Districts Association of Oregon, and for good measure, the Oregon School Boards Association. When we negotiated for this 2019 pre-session filing, Elections staff asked that ORESTAR and OCVR not be cited, that candidate filing software references be generic. They foresaw either updating or replacing these programs. Concerns for replacing both programs for filing may have eased since updating ORESTAR may be possible. We understood at the time that the Elections Division preferred writing in-house software updates to purchasing proprietary replacement software and are not able to compare those costs or efficacy.

2021 update: the current preference, in keeping with recommendations shared by the Oregon E-Portal Advisory Board, are to consider proprietary software when possible, security and other updates professionally provided.

ORESTAR v OCVR Candidate filing and campaign contributions are transparent and publicly accessible through ORESTAR, but only available to state-level candidates. OCVR (Oregon Centralized Voter

Registration System) is used for voter registration and local candidate filing. Allowing all candidates to file with a centralized system could significantly reduce labor for local elections' staff, who must decipher and transcribe the usually hand-written filing forms. If candidates are unable or prefer not to file online, Clerks and Recorders may continue to file electronically on their behalf, much as they do now. Filing fee collection would remain with presiding, certifying officials.

League interest We appreciate the possible increased efficiency of filing online. To provide voting information, the League needs candidate emails for our [Voters' Guides](#). We now list *all* Oregon candidates and ballot measures online. Since local candidates file via OCVR, which does not accept online filing and is not publicly accessible, we must contact all County Clerks and check with most of the 240-some City Recorders, usually repeatedly. They all process candidate information differently and accessing it is extremely demanding for the League. We are committed to making it easier for voters.

Election concerns We agree with the Elections Division for needing expeditious software updating and we do not advocate for a transition during ongoing election filings.

- Maintain and support major applications to keep pace with rapid technological advancements in voting processes and voters' expectations in a digital world.
- Consider funding of unplanned Special elections.
- Statutory changes affecting ORESTAR performance and functionality that are not accompanied by additional funding or resources.
- The time, expense and unpredictable number and nature of lawsuits against the Division.
- Managing the two major applications, OCVR and ORESTAR, that exist in two distinctly separate architecture environments and are maintained and supported in contrasting ways.
- The Oregon Centralized Voter Registration System was funded with federal funds, now depleted.