



NORTHWEST HEALTH
FOUNDATION

May 14, 2021

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

Northwest Health Foundation (NWHF) seeks to advance, support and promote health in Oregon and Southwest Washington. We know that much of what drives health and disparities therein stems from choices we make as a society—choices largely decided through public policy by public officials. So, how we choose those public officials, who has the opportunity to run for office and how all voters are engaged in democracy are fundamental questions to the health of every person.

As a foundation we have the privilege of dedicating resources to work that will address who gets to shape public policy. And we've set our sights on a reflective democracy where elected officials and voters reflect the diverse identities and experiences of their communities. But our democracy, in America and in Oregon, is anything but reflective. But it can be. Reflective democracy requires policies that promote it.

The changes outlined in HB 2680 can advance a more reflective democracy. There are two critical things that are important to get right:

- a. Community-based organizations do critical work to promote democracy. Given Oregon's growing unaffiliated voter base and voters who remain unengaged and unimportant to traditional approaches, community-based organizations focused on underrepresented people play a crucial role in educating and mobilizing about the issues and candidates that appear on the ballot. They connect with voters, but not the voters who always vote. After all, regular voters are easy to reach and do not require as much effort to engage in the political process. Many BIPOC-led organizations spend their resources on voters who are often overlooked: young, low-income, English language learners, renters, rural, unaffiliated—often a combination of all these identities. These voters are expensive to reach: it takes multiple touch points, bi-lingual staff and more. When limits are applied to cash and in-kind, it directly impacts how (and if) community-based organizations do their critical work, the end result may be less democracy, not more.
- b. A more level playing field for reflective candidates requires not just reducing the outsized role of money, but alternatives. Campaign finance reform is not the only barrier to seeing more women and people of color across the political spectrum running and winning elected office. Public matching systems and other approaches that treat everyone like a big donor give candidates more time to engage all voters, not just those that can write the big checks. It reduces the role of gatekeepers, and it makes public service far more possible for underrepresented leaders.

As our founding board chair, Senator Mark Hatfield once said, “our problem is not the lack of knowing; it is the lack of doing.” We know Oregonians want a campaign system that advances a

democracy of, by and for all people. We know that too few hold too much sway in elections and policy making. Great legislation can change this.

Thank you for your time and your service to our great state,
Jesse Beason
President & CEO