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Senate Committee On Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110 Implementation

Chair Prozanski and Members of the Committee,

Good morning Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and members of the committee. My name is Kristen Sartor and I live in North Portland. Thank you for allowing me to express my immense support for Senate Bill 571, which would ensure that persons who are imprisoned are able to vote.

As a mental health professional, I often reflect on the purpose of America's system of mass incarceration, which imprisons a higher rate of people than any other country in the world. We need to ask ourselves if the ultimate goal of putting people behind bars is to work towards rehabilitation or if it is simply a form of punishment.

If we would like to see our fellow humans return to their communities as productive members of society, we must focus on rehabilitation. This includes recognizing the humanity, citizenship and dignity of each and every person, regardless of their circumstances or convictions. The right to vote, something many of us take for granted, can make a huge personal difference to someone who is incarcerated and cut off from society in many ways. It gives people an opportunity to continue to be invested in and engaged with their community.

When we treat imprisonment simply as punishment, it is easy for people who are incarcerated to view the government as an enemy and to feel totally ostracized from society. It is senseless to take away the right to vote from someone because they have committed a crime; there are no safety concerns with incarcerated persons voting. When we strip away the right to vote from our citizens, we simply make it harder for them to feel connected and invested to their communities and this makes reintegration into society much more difficult.

Please support Senate Bill 571 and restore voting rights to our incarcerated citizens.

Thank you very much for your time and service,

Kristen Sartor