



Building Power for  
Communities of Color



TO: Senate Committee on Rules  
DA: February 10, 2022  
RE: Opposition to SB 1561

Chair Wagner, Vice-Chair Knopp and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 1561 and provide insight on the potential implications for C4 nonprofit organizations in Oregon.

We appreciate that the intention of this bill is to strengthen our democratic systems and enact long overdue campaign finance reform policies for Oregon. The advocacy work that we do, the purpose of our C4s, is rooted in the same mission. We also share the desire to reduce the influence of big money in Oregon's elections and create a more inclusive democracy through a more transparent system that is accountable to voters.

We are organizations based around protecting reproductive healthcare, advocating for LGBTQ2SIA+ rights, protecting the climate, and empowering Black, Indigenous and other People of Color (BIPOC) Oregonians. Our mission is to build the capacity and power of communities through supporting their engagement in democracy. And we've been doing this—we know firsthand how political campaigns work and the impact of unchecked money in politics.

Over the past year we have been engaged in extensive conversations with legislators, labor organizations, campaign finance reform advocates (locally and nationally) and other C4 nonprofits to discuss the best path to achieve the goals above. **In those conversations we have continued to highlight that we must pursue campaign finance reform policies that ensure that other emerging grassroots organizations can meaningfully engage in similar ways in the future.** Any reform needs to empower community-based organizations to *better* engage BIPOC communities, building a more representative democracy.

**Unfortunately, SB 1561 is not an approach we can support.** We fear that the cumulative effect of these policies as currently written have the real potential to further disadvantage grassroots organizing, person-to-person direct voter engagement, multilingual voter outreach, and more— all of which are critical for improving electoral engagement by Oregonians from all walks of life— while allowing individual wealthy donors to use independent expenditures to continue to funnel big money into political races. Based on decades of experience, we know

that big money will always find a way and that our best resources are empowered communities.

We need to be certain that any policy this important works for all of us. As written, SB 1561 would not only negatively impact the critical work currently being done by C4s, it will increase the barrier for entry for other community groups and prevent them from engaging in this work. This chilling effect will reinforce and worsen racial inequities in our political system during a time when voting rights, particularly those of BIPOC communities, are under attack more than ever.

Let's generate solutions together. There is a real interest and belief from C4 organizations that we can get this right if we can get to true engagement and consensus.

In partnership.