



February 17, 2022

Senate Committee on Rules  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, OR 97301

**RE: Testimony in Support of SB 1566**

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

I am Sandy Chung, Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Oregon, a civil liberties and civil rights organization representing more than 28,000 members statewide.

**Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of SB 1566.**

Under the provisions of Senate Bill 1566, the base annual salary for an Oregon state legislator would go from \$32,839 to about \$57,000. I start by noting these numbers because at the current level of \$32,839, the pay of state legislators does even not meet the legal salary requirement for exempt status under federal law. At \$32,839, the pay of state legislators is not much above the federal poverty level, which is \$27,750 for a family of four in 2022.

At the current salary level, how do most of our legislators without personal or family wealth survive? They work second jobs. And it should also be noted that for many state legislators, the responsibilities of their legislator duties and second jobs are on top of their responsibilities and time commitments to spouses, young children, and elderly parents.

We can keep pretending that state legislator positions are “part-time positions.” We can keep pretending that state legislators are able to supervise their legislative offices and staff, listen to their communities and constituents, participate in community events, research and draft bills, participate in endless legislative sessions and special sessions, and do a myriad of other duties as legislators, while also working another full-time or part-time job. But this would be pretense and untrue, and keeping up this pretense would continue to create an enormous disservice to Oregonians.

A basic check and balance for accountability in democracy is this: that if a legislator is not serving the people or doing a good enough job in the position, the people have the ability to elect someone else who will serve the people and do a better job. However, under the

current salary levels for state legislators, many people in our communities cannot afford to run for state office. This means that the slate of candidates for state legislative positions aren't necessarily the best or the brightest of us.

Oregonians deserve to have the best and brightest of our family members, neighbors, and community members represent us in the Oregon State Legislature. What does best and brightest mean? Legislators who are hard working, honest, have integrity, and have lived experiences and values that align with the lived experiences and values of Oregonians. Legislators who care about and will fight for an Oregon of greater justice, equity, and care.

As well, Oregonians deserve people of many different backgrounds, experiences, and identities representing us as state legislators: young people, parents and single parents, single wage earners, frontline workers, agricultural workers, teachers, people with low-incomes, people with houselessness experiences, more Black, Indigenous, and people of color, and so much more.

To state the obvious, none of these attributes – values, lived experiences, and diverse backgrounds – are connected to whether a person has personal or family wealth.

In summary, HB 1566 will make our democracy more vibrant and strong by making it possible for many more people of all backgrounds to serve as state legislators regardless of personal or family wealth.

**Therefore, we strongly urge the Committee to support SB 1566.**

Thank you,

Sandy Chung  
Executive Director  
ACLU of Oregon  
Pronouns: she, her