



10507 N. McAlister Road
La Grande, Oregon 97850
541-963-1313

June 6, 2023

Senate Committee on Rules

Subject: Opposition to Senate Bill 775, Soil and Water Conservation District Director Eligibility

Attention: Chair Lieber and Committee Members,

The Union Soil and Water Conservation District (Union SWCD) opposes Senate Bill 775, and proposed changes to eligibility requirements for Soil and Water Conservation District Directors as described in ORS 568.560. We are aware the proposed amendments apply to a population threshold of 250,000 or greater and would not immediately impact our district in Union County, but still oppose this bill on the basis that these changes undermine the agricultural focus of conservation districts and the foundational reasons for formation.

The Union SWCD provides technical support to agricultural producers and farm managers in Union County for protecting natural resources and implementing conservation practices. Providing useful technical assistance and successful conservation solutions requires communication with farming and ranching operators and knowledge of the specific issues and concerns they face. It is imperative to the mission of conservation districts to have a board of directors that are interested in promoting a successful agricultural community, knowledgeable about area-specific agriculture operations and production, and aware of the responsibilities and regulations that apply to land managers. Directors that are involved and participating as an active part of the agricultural community assures this interest and knowledge.

In the experience of the Union SWCD, we do not think the current requirements of property ownership is exclusionary nor unduly limits the ability to become a director. A person not meeting the property ownership requirements and interested in becoming a director has two pathways for becoming a director in the existing regulations. The two at-large director positions only require the person to reside within the district boundary and be a registered voter, while the second path is to serve at least one year as a director (at-large) or associate director and have a conservation plan approved by the district. Both these pathways have been utilized by Union SWCD directors in the past and the Board welcomes interested involvement from anyone in within the district that contribute to the district mission and goals.

The Union SWCD encourages the Senate Committee on Rules to consider the purpose and role of soil and water conservation districts and withdraw SB 775. Soil and water conservation districts have a very focused purpose and specific audience, in contrast to other special districts and organizations with less restrictive requirements for candidacy.

Respectfully,



Jarod Teeter

District Chair, Union SWCD Board of Directors