

Submitter: Michele Levis
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Rules
Measure: SB775

May 31, 2023

To: Senate Rules Committee
Re: SB 775 Soil and Water Conservation District Board Eligibility

Chair Lieber and Committee Members,

I live in Multnomah County, and I think that land ownership or control should not be a requirement to run for Soil & Water Conservation District Director. I support SB 775, which seeks to update eligibility rules for soil and water conservation districts. SB 775 will allow candidates in counties with populations over 250,000 to serve as zone directors without the requirement of owning or managing at least 10 acres of land. Land ownership or control of at least 10 acres is an antiquated requirement that has no place in determining who can serve as a director, especially in an urban area where it severely limits who can run and goes against the principles of equal representation. SB 775 will ensure an open, fair, and democratic process that allows conservation district boards to represent everyone in their district.

Currently, the only way around this requirement is for the members of the Board of Directors to appoint a person as an Associate Director; after serving as an Associate Director for one year, the interested person would be eligible to run to serve as a voting member of the Board of Directors. This option is not ideal. Conservation district directors are volunteers who care deeply and work tirelessly to keep waterways, soils, habitats, forests, and farms in the community healthy. They are welcoming of fellow volunteers willing to serve as Associate Directors, however, a basic tenet of a democratic, fair, and equitable process would be to not make potential candidates subject to appointment by those currently in power due to potential conflicts of interest (appointed Associate Directors could run against current Directors in future elections) and unconscious biases.

Please help Oregon have a democratic, fair, and equitable process for running for conservation district zone directors in counties with populations over 250,000 by supporting SB 775.

Thank you for your consideration,

Michele Levis
Multnomah County, Oregon