

RE: Support Guaranteeing the Right to Vote, SB 579
Senate Committee on Judiciary

1/24/2023

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Anna Debenham and I live in Portland. I am writing to testify in strong support for Guaranteeing the Right to Vote, SB 579, which will ensure every eligible Oregonian can register to vote, update their voter registration, and vote in elections based on where they resided prior to incarceration.

The right to vote is enshrined in our constitution and fundamental to a vibrant and participatory democracy. Yet, around 12,000 people in Oregon are currently denied their right to vote, leading to low-income, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people being disproportionately disenfranchised. Guaranteeing the Right to Vote fulfills the promise of our democracy while improving public safety, and addressing racial and socioeconomic inequities.

As a program Director for an organisation that works with incarcerated individuals I believe strongly in their right to have a say in the policy and bills passed in this state. Just because people have made mistakes and end up in prison does not mean they are bad people that don't deserve the right to shape Oregon's future. I see all humans, in this case incarcerated humans as innately whole, people that can heal and grow and elevate themselves and we need to include them in our democratic system.

As an Oregonian, I know that connection to community through civic engagement while incarcerated leads to healthier communities, that voting is a civic right and responsibility, and that we can address unjust impacts of mass incarceration.

I am not alone. This legislation is supported by over 40 civil rights organizations, faith-based groups, as well as dozens of currently and formerly incarcerated people. Please ensure that Guaranteeing the Right to Vote, SB 579, is passed out of committee.

Thank you,

Anna Debenham