

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

January 25, 2023

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

My name is Cloud Hayes and I live in Salem, Oregon. 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 the disproportionate disenfranchisement of low-income, Black, Indigenous, and Latine people. Guaranteeing the Right to Vote fulfills the promise of our democracy while improving public safety, and addressing racial and socioeconomic inequities.

Oregonians that are incarcerated in our prisons and jails have been denied access to our democratic process for centuries. People that are incarcerated already lose a great deal of autonomy and access to their communities and families. There is no reason they should also be denied their right to vote. Denying them access to the democratic system only adds more punishment; being incarcerated is punishment enough.

A county that prides itself on its democracy cannot in good conscious deny the right to vote to thousands of people solely because they are in the prison system. A state that prides itself on its liberal protections for all cannot in good conscious deny the right to vote to one of the most venerable populations particularly, particularly when that population largely consists of people of color.

Furthermore, people that are incarcerated are subject to the same laws as people that are not incarcerated. New statues are frequently passed and amended that greatly impact the lives of people that are incarcerated. There is no reason they should not have their voices heard in matters that affect them.

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 in my support for this important bill. 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,

Cloud Hayes