

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

January 25, 2023

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

For the past six years, I have had the honor of working with people who are incarcerated. Prisons are small cities full of people working hard together to ensure that the lights turn on, the food is cooked, the grounds are maintained. They support one another through peer-to-peer mentorship; leading restorative justice workshops; participating in AA and NA meetings; and they sit hospice with their elders, caring for them as they pass from this world to the next. Folks struggle with the harm they have caused their victims, families, and community. Making amends requires a person to do deep personal work and it requires them to participate in community: growing food for the local food bank, organizing a winter coat drive; learning as much as possible about the outside world. Prisons are filled with people who have survived traumatic histories and dig deep to be better, stronger version of themselves with a goal of rejoining their family and friends outside. They need our trust if they have any chance of being successful on the outside. What better illustration of this than restoring their ability to exercise the responsibility of voting?

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,  
Tracy Schlapp, Portland, Oregon  
Creative Director, Bridgeworks Oregon