

## CIVICS FOR ADULTS – COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

### *Enhancing Civic Knowledge / Inspiring Political Engagement*

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To: Senate Committee on Judiciary

From: Donna L Cohen, MLIS, MEd, Civics for Adults, Portland, Oregon

Date: 1/26/23

Re: SB 579

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and members of the Committee:

I teach workshops on Civics for adults through libraries and community organizations in Oregon and other states. One of my workshops concerns elections and we discuss the expansion of voting rights from the time of the country's founding. It is to our country's credit that we have sought to expand voting rights throughout our history – although it should be noted, not without a great deal of struggle.

We do not have a fundamental right to vote in our Constitution. The Framers would have thought such a thing shocking. Even the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Amendments were not foundational; they were, in essence, anti-discrimination Amendments, finally acknowledging that where white men could vote, so should Black men have that right. And, where men could vote, so should women be able to.

One only has to look at the myriad ways that states block access to the franchise, including by incarceration, to see that these laws would not have existed if there was a fundamental right to vote in this country.

So, this battle for the right of persons who are incarcerated to vote is but a part of the long story to achieve voting rights in this country. Oregon can be among the leaders of those states that have understood to deprive a person of the right to vote because they are incarcerated is to mete out a punishment far beyond what is reasonable or wise. Please support SB 579 with a "Do-Pass" recommendation.

◇ *Misinformation, Fake News and Political Propaganda*

◇ *The Constitution: Fulfilling Democracy's Promise?- Democracy, The Constitution and Representation*

◇ *Beyond Voting: Elections and Campaign Finance*

◇ *Citizen Activism 101 – Making Change Happen*

***"The most important political office is that of the private citizen." Justice Louis Brandeis***