



I am testifying on behalf of the Democratic Party of Multnomah County's Criminal Justice Study Group, which is in favor of voting rights for all incarcerated Oregon citizens of legal age. We strongly support SB 579.

The disenfranchisement over 160 years ago of Oregonian citizens incarcerated with a felony conviction was based in racism, and has no justification. Other racist laws have recently been removed in Oregon: The 13TH Amendment slavery exception for incarcerated individuals was removed from Oregon's Constitution in 2022. And felony convictions by a non-unanimous jury were ruled unconstitutional. Now it's time to add felony disenfranchisement to the list.

Currently, all Oregonian citizens completing criminal sentences on Probation or Parole (Post-prison supervision) regain their right to register to vote automatically. We must ask ourselves whether it then stands to reason that they should not vote while incarcerated. When a person is convicted of a felony and is incarcerated, they lose their freedom, not their citizenship.

In addition, almost all incarcerated people are going to return to our communities. Keeping positive contacts with society contributes to their re-entry success—and one example is retaining an interest in what's going on in the community and the country and the role of our political representatives.

It will be especially easy to provide voting rights in Oregon, since we have universal vote-by-mail, with no postal charge.

In Maine and Vermont people in prison never lost their right to vote. Oregon could be the first State to actually reverse its misguided felony disenfranchisement policy, which disproportionately affects Black, Latinx and Indigenous prisoners. Let's add voting to the list of what prepares Oregon's incarcerated population for successful re-entry. Oregon can be a leader again in smart policy!