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Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary:

For the record, I am Jessica Ventura, Legislative Director for Secretary of State Shemia Fagan, Oregon's chief elections officer. Secretary Fagan supports SB 579. Evidence suggests that when those who are incarcerated retain their right to vote, they remain more connected to society and recidivism rates are reduced. The simple act of voting and adding your voice to decisions about our democracy shows everyone that every person in our community, state, and country has a voice.

This is a civil rights issue. Black, brown, and indigenous people, and people of color are overrepresented in our criminal justice system due to a variety of systemic discriminatory factors. Jim Crow-era voting laws specifically intended to target people of color by tying incarceration to a loss of voting rights. In Oregon, about 15,000 people are incarcerated statewide; nearly 10% are veterans, and 75% of the women are mothers. Nationally the ACLU reports that, "As of 2016, 1 in 56 non-black voters lost their right to vote. Conversely, 1 in 13 black voters lost their right to vote."

Like many contentious issues, when you look to other states, there is a significant variance in how the policies are crafted. Currently, Vermont, Main, the District of Columbia¹ and many countries (Canada, Israel, and South Africa to name a few) never disenfranchise voters. Oregon is among the 21 states that allow people to vote upon release. In 16 states, people are allowed to vote upon release after paying fines or restitution, and completion of parole and/or probation. Lastly, 11 states completely disenfranchise people who are convicted of certain crimes, require a governor's pardon, implement an additional waiting period, or require additional steps to earn back the right to vote.

Ultimately, the work of deciding criminal sentencing law lies with the Legislature. The Secretary of State Election Division is available to answer questions and discuss implementation. Oregon has already taken the significant step in this direction years ago by allowing Oregonians with felony criminal convictions to vote upon completion of their sentence. [SB 579](#) would take the final step in enfranchisement by allowing Oregonians to vote while serving their sentence.

Sincerely,
Jessica Ventura
Legislative Director

¹ <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/felon-voting-rights>

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