

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

01/26/2023

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

My name is **Patrick Kennedy** and I live in **Portland, OR**. 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.

In America we talk a lot about democracy and our fundamental, “god-given” rights. When we deny our incarcerated neighbors a voice we strip them of their humanity. We have unions to give workers a voice and power to hold corporations accountable when they treat workers as less than human, yet when Oregonians who are incarcerated are treated as less than human we tell ourselves it’s what they deserve. How can we expect people to become better if we tell them they’re not even human?

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,

Patrick Kennedy