

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

January 27th, 2023

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

My name is Elyse Kupfer and I live in Portland. 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 Latinx people. Guaranteeing the Right to Vote fulfills the promise of our democracy while improving public safety, and addressing racial and socioeconomic inequities.

In my work as an investigator and legal advocate, I have ongoing contact with dozens – if not more – of people who are incarcerated in this state over the years. These folks must not be stripped of their rights to vote simply because they are labeled “felons.” They are *citizens*, equal to you and I. Their rights should reflect that reality. Their voices should be heard. Denying an entire population of citizens their right to vote, you perpetuate an ongoing narrative that they are meaningless. If incarceration is meant to “rehabilitate” then we must strive to empower those who are incarcerated to engage in their community in a way that is meaningful.

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,

Elyse Kupfer