



SB 579 Will Guarantee Every Eligible Oregonian Has the Right to Vote

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Senate Bill 579, which would end felony disenfranchisement and ensure all eligible incarcerated Oregonians are able to register to vote, update their voter registration, and vote in elections based on where they resided prior to incarceration.

My name is Peter Skopec, and I am Director of Advocacy for Secure Democracy USA, a national, nonpartisan nonprofit that works across the aisle to build confidence in our elections and improve voter access across the United States. We collaborate with state leaders, election administrators, policy experts, and allies to ensure that all eligible citizens have the freedom to vote how they choose.

Secure Democracy USA is proud to be part of a broad coalition of over 40 civil rights organizations, faith-based groups, and dozens of currently- and formerly-incarcerated people who endorse SB 579. We respectfully encourage you to support this measure, which would further strengthen Oregon's reputation as a national leader in protecting and expanding the freedom to vote.

Exercising one's right to vote – and knowing that one's voice is heard – are fundamental to a vibrant, functioning democracy. SB 579 will strengthen our democracy by helping incarcerated Oregonians feel connected to their communities. It will also increase their chances of successful reentry into society after prison. Active civic engagement has been linked to lower rates of recidivism. Disenfranchisement laws, on the other hand, make this reentry more challenging by severing the civic bonds that connect Oregonians to their communities.

Ending disenfranchisement and guaranteeing every citizen's eligibility to vote – including currently incarcerated people – has public support. A 2022 poll conducted on behalf of the State Innovation Exchange, the Sentencing Project, and other organizations found that 56 percent of surveyed voters favor "guarantee[ing] the eligibility to vote for all citizens 18 and older, including citizens completing their sentence, both inside and outside of prison, compared to just 35 percent who say they would oppose." Already in 2023, six states have introduced legislation that would allow incarcerated people to vote.

We applaud Oregon for being a national leader in protecting and expanding access to the polls, including through automatic voter registration, by mailing return-postage-paid ballots

to all registered voters, and offering pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds. Your support for SB 579 would further demonstrate Oregon's commitment to improving public safety and guaranteeing everyone's right to vote.

We thank Sen. Prozanski, Sen. Gelsler Blouin, Sen. Dembrow, and Sen. Manning for their leadership in sponsoring SB 579. We respectfully urge you to support this important proposal.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Skopec', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Peter Skopec
Director of Advocacy
Secure Democracy USA