

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

January 27, 2023

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

My name is Devin Ruiz and I live in Portland, Oregon. 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.

Growing up, my family was deeply impacted by the criminal justice system and recidivism that occurs when people that are incarcerated are isolated away from their community and not seen as worthy of the resources necessary during and after incarceration. We know that the majority of Oregonians who are incarcerated are expected to return to their communities and we also know that civic engagement in the way of voting allows for people to feel accountable to their community, city, and state. I firmly believe and support SB 579. I believe everyone should have the right to vote and I know that voting would allow people who are incarcerated a better chance at reentry through helping them maintain civic habits. Success reentry not only impacted the individual but everyone connected to them and their communities as a whole.

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,

Devin Ruiz