

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

January 25, 2023

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

My name is Melinda Venegas, 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.

I am Mexican and Native American who have family members and friends from the Latine, Black, and Indigenous communities who have been or are incarcerated which cannot vote. This affects my people, our incarcerated people, and our communities as a whole because they are not able to give a voice or give back in one of the most important ways when this civil right is taken away. This does not allow our incarcerated people to be looked at as full citizens nor does it make them feel they are “whole people” contributing to a “society” that wants them to be “reformed.” Taking away this civil right to vote takes from all of these communities disproportionately & under-represents us in a variety ways. This does not help build our communities, it breaks them down and when one community is broken we are all broken. We are all interconnected!

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,
Melinda Venegas

