



Date: February 14, 2023

To: House Committee on Rules

From: Ronnie Strode, Policy Analyst for the Urban League of Portland

Re: Opposition to Restricting the Right to Vote, HB 2585

Chair Fahey, Vice-Chairs Breese-Iverson and Kropf, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ronnie Strode and I am a Policy Analyst with the Urban League of Portland. The Urban League of Portland is one of Oregon's oldest civil rights and social service organizations, empowering African Americans and others to achieve equality in education, employment, health, economic security, and quality of life across Oregon and Southwest Washington. I respectfully submit this testimony in staunch opposition to House Bill 2585, which seeks to restrict or make inaccessible the fundamental right to vote for many Oregonians by undoing the progress we've made as a state to reduce the unnecessarily barriers to Oregon's voter registration process.

In its most recent State of Black America publication, "Under Siege: The Plot to Destroy Democracy," the National Urban League opens the report with setting the context of where democracy is under siege in the United States. In 1976, the first report "captured the plight of a people who had been victims of systemic racism since arriving on the shores of this nation. More than a century after enslaved people were freed at the end of the civil war, the political leadership in this country had failed to help Black Americans secure equal rights entitled to all Americans. Politicians, including the President, had also failed to adequately capture and address the systemic barriers to equitable employment, health, housing, education, social justice, civic participation, and economic opportunity. Out of this, the State of Black America was born."^[1] We are again raising the alarm about the outlook for Black and Brown people; political forces have launched an all-out assault on voting rights that disproportionately affects the communities that we serve.

State legislatures across the nation are restricting voting access in districts with large populations of African Americans and other people of color. So why would we follow suit here in Oregon? A state that is a leader in protecting and expanding voting rights through measures like universal vote by mail, automatic voter registration, paid postage, postmarked ballots on elections day, and other similar measures. In fact, based on data from the 2022 election, Oregon had the highest voter turnout amongst all fifty states.³ By reducing barriers to voter registration, Oregon now has over 3 million registered voters;^[2] for context, prior to the inception of our motor voter process in 2016, Oregon had less than 2.2 million registered voters.^[3] By reducing unnecessary barriers to civic participation, in the span of seven years, Oregon registered 900,000 more voters.

However, House Bill 2585 seeks to revert to an opt-in process, which would inevitably result in fewer Oregonians registering to vote (especially BIPOC voters); to reverse



course from this culture of inclusive initiatives remains antithetical and counterproductive to the progress that Oregon's made. If we do nothing, we will see the disenfranchisement of voters across this state; being able to cast a vote, especially for Black communities, has been part and parcel of the social contract made with America post-slavery into reconstruction and after the Jim Crow and any infringement upon this liberty should be vetted with the utmost scrutiny with a lens bent towards equity. Please do not pass HB 2585. Oregonians are counting on you to foster inclusion and to uphold Oregon's stated commitment to racial equality. Our democracy is at stake.

Respectfully,

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^[1] <https://soba.iamempowered.com/sites/soba.iamempowered.com/files/NUL-SOBA-2022-ExecSummary-web.pdf>.

^[2] <https://sos.oregon.gov/elections/Documents/registration/2022-november.pdf>

^[3] <https://www.opb.org/article/2022/11/05/oregon-hits-3-million-registered-voters-ahead-of-election-day/>