



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Testimony in Support for SB 169

March 14, 2023

Chair Lieber, Vice Chair Knopp, and members of the committee,

My name is Khanh Pham, State Representative for HD 46, representing outer Southeast Portland. I am honored to testify in support of SB 169 with the -2 amendment, which builds upon the Voter Language Access Act that my office wrote and championed in 2021. I want to thank Secretary Fagan, the SOS team, the Translation Advisory Council, our County Elections officials, and tireless civic engagement advocates who have taken our bill from last session and implemented an invaluable resource for Oregon's democracy.

The State of Oregon is known for knocking down barriers that prevent voters from engaging in the political process, and we demonstrated that legacy again when we translated our cherished Voter Pamphlet Statements into the top spoken languages in Oregon. It's no coincidence that when our legislature, in partnership with the Secretary of State's Office, enshrined this vital service for Oregon voters, Oregonians responded by leading the US with highest voter turnout in the 2022 midterm elections – with 61.5% of all eligible citizens in OR casting a ballot.

In June 2021, when this bill was passed, we were still processing the delays and the incomplete data, at that time, that was available from the 2020 Census. With more time to analyze, coupled with the Bureau's annual American Communities Survey, and outstanding research work at Portland State University, we have a better understanding of the language needs of Oregonians. It is not new information to us that many voters continue to encounter language barriers in the voting process. And this bill can do something about that by taking the updated language needs information we now understand about our state, and turning it into effective public policy.

And as you can see, the Secretary's office is more than ready to implement this expansion so that more Oregonians, thousands of more voters, can be served and be more deeply involved in our civic life.

As I've said before and will repeat again today, I believe the right to vote includes the right to understand what is being voted on. I believe that a person's desire to understand what they're voting on, to learn about the issues, and to be civically engaged, should be commended, and something our state will further facilitate in our democracy with the passage of this bill.

I urge the committee to support SB 169 with the -2 amendment. Thank you.