

May 22, 2023

To: Senate Rules Committee

Re: SB 775 Soil and Water Conservation District Board Eligibility

Chair Lieber, Vice Chair Knopp and Members of the Committee,

Senate Bill 775 seeks to update the eligibility rules for soil and water conservation districts so candidates for zoned seats in counties with populations of over 250,000 do not have to own or manage at least 10 acres of land. We believe this is a long overdue update to the current statute.

The current statute limiting eligible candidates for zoned seats to those who own or manage at least 10 acres does not realistically address the needs of Soil and Water districts with larger populations and significant urban considerations when making policy decisions regarding soil and water health.

Farms, while of critical importance, are not the only elected voice needed for districts with larger populations. Let's ensure that community leaders—both renters and homeowners—whose passions vary from urban tree canopies, stormwater runoff, and pesticide use in backyards, can bring a diversity of perspectives to these important elected bodies in our state.

There is a chronic issue of vacancies on these important boards. This would make eligible additional leaders in the community.

There are no restrictions to run for any other special districts: a candidate for school board doesn't have to have students in the district, a candidate for a fire board doesn't have to be a firefighter. I don't believe that the restrictions on who can run for the public office of Soil and Water Conservation District is right or ethical.

Finally, I serve on a local parks board; I know first hand what a diversity of opinion, lived experience and more brings to a team, a district and its patrons. This law as it currently stands is not in alignment with Oregon's values of diversity and accessibility.

This simple change will create opportunities for others and improve the lives of Oregonians. Please vote yes on Senate Bill 775.

Thank you for your consideration,
Felicita Monteblanco
Aloha, Oregon