

May 23, 2023

To: Senate Rules Committee
Re: SB 775 Soil and Water Conservation District Board Eligibility

Chair Lieber and Committee Members,

The City of Gresham would like to submit this letter of support for SB 775.

SB 775 seeks to update the eligibility rules for soil and water conservation districts so candidates for zoned seats in districts 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 City of Gresham is within the East Multnomah County Soil & Water Conservation District (EMSWCD) boundary, and based on current rules, none of our residents are eligible to run for a zoned position on their board. There are a few parcels greater than 10-acres in the city, but these are commercial and industrial properties, versus properties where people are farming. Plenty of our residents engage in urban agriculture, as well as other programs EMSWCD supports, including naturescaping and managing stormwater using rain gardens – but none of these residents are currently eligible.

Our residents pay taxes to support EMSWCD, yet none of our residents are eligible to run for a leadership position of this organization. There are no restrictions to run for any other special districts such as school boards, fire districts, etc., who are using public tax dollars in open elections on the ballot, so it is time to update the restriction limiting any of our residents who want to run for a board position on the EMSWCD from doing so.

The proposed rule will only impact soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) in Oregon with a population of over 250,000, so this change will only impact SWCDs that are likely already providing programming for urban residents. Allowing interested residents to be eligible to run for these positions will help ensure that urban voices are part of the decision making for these important organizations.

Thank you for your consideration,

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