

36702 Ichabod Street
Sandy, Oregon 97055

May 25, 2023

Attention: Senator Kate Lieber, Chair, Senate Rules Committee
Senator Tim Knopp, Vice Chair, Senate Rules Committee

RE: SB 775

I am writing as a board member of the Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation District. Our board in a submitted vote were opposed to changing the standard of board member eligibility to only a registered voter. Today I am writing on behalf of my board position as I did not receive notice of the hearing from OLIS even though I have been signed up to receive information on this bill and on the Senate Rules Committee hearings so there is not adequate time for our full board and the district to respond. I had to hear about the hearing in the Capital Press this morning.

In 2021 the state association of conservation districts and the Oregon Department of Agriculture sent a survey asking each of the 45 conservation district boards to vote on their board's position on this issue. A total of 78% of the districts, including Clackamas SWCD, were not in support of the change.

East Multnomah SWCD could easily have a greater urban board by changing their board members from 5 to the 7 allowed under the law and changing their zone lines to include more of the city. West Multnomah's board was split on supporting the change, but a vote of 4-3 ultimately supported the concept. The Tualatin SWCD board discussed whether they would support SB 775, but they could not arrive at a decision to do so. So, you can see this is an issue without consensus.

Our district has 4 board members who do not meet the 10-acre threshold because the statute clearly states that serving as an associate director for one year allows you to run for a board position without meeting a landownership requirement. We have two at-large board members, as does every district, and two who served for one year as associates to represent a zone. Their knowledge is very important to us.

Why is it important to have some kind of requirement for serving on the board? Board members work with their neighbors and network on conservation practices and policies and help them gain technical support as well as support through grants from federal and state agencies and sometimes from districts directly. Breaking down that communication in the community is detrimental to conservation. Our county is one of the top agriculture producers in the state and sharing that knowledge through our board members and staff is important. Most states have similar board eligibility requirements.

The Clackamas District promotes urban conservation as well as rural agricultural and restoration efforts. When we had at-large seats up for election, we have found that people running have chosen to run because they represented far left and far right political parties and the candidates were seeking a step up to future elections. One of the issues districts talked about was having some kind of threshold with an understanding of natural resource issues if there needed to be an alternative approach. It would be better to work with the districts as a whole toward finding a good option that maintains knowledge and networking.

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