



March 6, 2025

RE: Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 18

Dear Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon (ACLU of Oregon). The ACLU of Oregon is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing civil liberties and civil rights, with more than 43,000 members and donor supporters statewide.

We oppose Senate Bill 18, which would unnecessarily increase criminal penalties for certain election-related offenses. Although well-intentioned to safeguard election integrity—a pillar of our civil, free society—there is no evidence that harsher penalties are needed.

Trustworthy elections are the cornerstone of our democracy and essential to defending our civil liberties and civil rights. **Meaningful access to elections is critical to the democratic process and any legislation affecting it must be approached with extreme care.**

SB 18 would:

- Increase the civil and criminal penalties for election-related offenses.
- Turn several misdemeanors into felonies.
- Significantly raise civil penalties for repeat violations.

These changes could have a chilling effect on civic participation by discouraging volunteers, elections workers, and other engaged citizens from taking part in activities such as voter registration drives and the initiative petition process. The fear of severe legal liability, like the penalties provided by SB 18, would disproportionately deter those without financial or institutional resources, further marginalizing their voices.

Additionally, election workers could be discouraged from serving, potentially leading to resignations or fewer applicants for these essential roles. This is despite the fact that Oregon's initiative petition process is carefully designed to empower the people. Our voter registration system has clear rules and regulations, and extremely rare errors. There is no demonstrated need for SB 18's severe penalties.

- The available data on complaints received by the Secretary of State since 2010 shows that election offenses are exceedingly rare.
- Many of the offenses targeted by SB 18 have had zero complaints.
- Furthermore, a complaint does not equate to a proven violation, and without evidence of widespread, unaddressed violations, there is no justification for such drastic changes.

Passing Senate Bill 18 will not make our elections safer. Instead, it will deter civic engagement and weaken our democracy. Oregon already has free, fair, and secure elections administered by dedicated public servants and myriad volunteers. There is simply no need to impose increased penalties for existing offenses.

The ACLU of Oregon urges your opposition to SB 18 and asks you to not pass it out of committee.

Respectfully,

Michael Abrams, Policy Counsel

For any questions, please email Jessica Maravilla, Policy Director at jmaravilla@aclu-or.org