

Submitter: Hilary Kissell

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Rules

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB210

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Rules,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 210, which seeks to eliminate Oregon's vote-by-mail system in favor of mandatory in-person voting on Election Day. As a resident of Portland, I am deeply concerned about the detrimental impact this bill would have on voter participation, accessibility, and the integrity of our electoral process.

Background on Oregon's Vote-by-Mail System

Oregon has been a pioneer in implementing vote-by-mail, becoming the first state to conduct all elections by mail following the passage of Ballot Measure 60 in 1998. This system was established to increase voter participation and has since become a model of efficiency and security.

Advantages of Vote-by-Mail

Increased Voter Participation: Vote-by-mail has consistently led to higher voter turnout. By providing ballots directly to voters' homes, it removes barriers such as long lines and limited polling hours, making it easier for citizens to participate in elections.

Accessibility: This system ensures that all voters, including seniors, individuals with disabilities, and those with demanding work schedules, have equal access to the ballot. It accommodates those who may find it challenging to vote in person on a specific day.

Cost-Effectiveness: Conducting elections by mail has proven to be more economical. It reduces the need for staffing numerous polling stations and decreases expenses related to equipment and facilities.

Security and Accuracy: Oregon's vote-by-mail system includes robust security measures. Each ballot is accompanied by a signature verification process, ensuring that only eligible voters can cast their votes. Additionally, the paper trail created by mail-in ballots enhances the transparency and verifiability of election results.

Concerns Regarding Senate Bill 210

The proposed shift to mandatory in-person voting raises several concerns:

Reduced Voter Turnout: Eliminating vote-by-mail could disenfranchise voters who rely on the convenience and accessibility of mailing their ballots. This change may lead to decreased participation, undermining the democratic process.

Accessibility Challenges: In-person voting may pose significant challenges for individuals with mobility issues, those living in remote areas, or those unable to take time off work. The current system allows these voters to participate without undue hardship.

Increased Costs: Transitioning back to in-person voting would likely result in higher operational costs due to the need for more polling stations, staff, and equipment. This move seems fiscally irresponsible given the efficiency of the existing vote-by-mail system.

Public Health Considerations: In light of ongoing public health concerns, congregating at polling stations could pose risks to voters and election workers. Vote-by-mail offers a safer alternative that minimizes exposure.

Conclusion

Oregon's vote-by-mail system has stood the test of time, demonstrating its effectiveness in promoting voter engagement, ensuring accessibility, and maintaining election integrity. Senate Bill 210 threatens to dismantle a system that has served our state well for decades. I urge you to oppose this bill and uphold the voting method that reflects Oregon's commitment to inclusive and secure elections.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

Hilary Kissell

Happy Valley, OR