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Chair Jama, Vice-chair Bonham and members of the committee,

I am writing with concerns from our members about SB 1046, which would designate the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) as an agency responsible for voter registration during the process of obtaining hunting and fishing licenses. SEIU 503 represents over 22,000 members who work in state offices throughout Oregon, including at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

SEIU 503 supports efforts to further expand automatic voter registration, including to ODFW. We believe that it is important to do so efficiently and securely, as well as with adequate support, training and funding for staff to effectively do voter registration and transfer that data to the Secretary of State.

While the intent behind the bill may be to simplify and encourage voter registration, our ODFW members have concerns. Our members' concerns with the bill are around the requirement to collect proof of citizenship from individuals applying for hunting or fishing licenses, as well as the administrative and financial burden this would place on an agency and its employees that are not set up to successfully handle voter registration information. They understand that an important addition like voter registration would take time, training and funding to implement successfully.

Hunting and fishing are activities that should remain accessible to all residents of Oregon who are legally permitted to engage in them. However, asking citizens to provide proof of citizenship to register to vote during the hunting or fishing license application process creates unnecessary barriers for residents, particularly those who may not have access to official documentation or may be unaware of the new requirements. Our members point to the fact that ODFW stopped collecting citizenship information when the current licensing system was implemented, so starting to collect that information again to do voter registration could create an unintended consequence that all non-citizens who can currently get a license to go fishing or hunting will no longer be able to.

While SEIU 503 supports efforts to improve voter registration and encourage civic participation, the concerns surrounding proof of citizenship, implementation at the agency level, and potential disenfranchisement of hunters and fishers must be addressed before any such policy is implemented.

I urge this committee SB 1046 and to explore alternative, more appropriate ways to facilitate voter registration without overburdening ODFW employees and disrupting the fishing and hunting licensing system.

Sincerely,

Elsie Elling



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