



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Chair Garrett and member of the House Committee on Rules:

I have come to testify before you today on House Bill 3506, relating to bilingual voting requirements.

During the fall when I was running for office, I knocked on a lot of my constituents' doors talking to them about the upcoming election. Several times I ran into a number of my constituents whose primary language was not English and in some cases it proved to be a language barrier. It made me question our neighbors' ability to cast their ballot, read their voters pamphlet statements, or understand deadlines that are approaching to ensure that their voice is heard through the electoral process. I hope that most of us if not all of us in this building can agree that all citizens have the right to vote, and I should hope we can all agree that they should be able to do so in a language that is most comfortable to them.

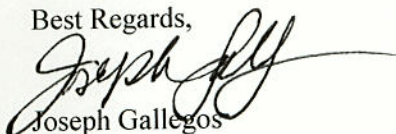
After noticing this difficulty, I looked into federal policy with regard the requirements of making non-English voting materials available. It requires that in a voting district, in Oregon it would be counties, there must have a 5% "minority population" (as defined by the National Voters' Rights Act and the Census Bureau) and the adult illiteracy rate needs to be greater than the national average. To me, the adult literacy rate is an unfair metric to be using in this equation. Literacy rates stem from a variety of issues, but not exclusive to what a person's first language may be. What is proposed in HB 3506 is a fairer way of fixing an obvious problem that we have across the state.

There are some lofty goals in this proposed bill. I have reached out to the Association of County Clerks and spoken to their president in Benton County, their legislative board members in Washington, Multnomah, Crook, Josephine counties and those who represent them through the Association of Oregon Counties. I want to be very clear, that none has given the bill their endorsement in its current form, but thus far, no one has contacted me in opposition of this bill because of its concept. I have conferred with Secretary Brown, and been in communication with her staff on more than one occasion about this bill, and neither the secretary nor her staff has voiced opposition due to this concept. We have all recognized citizens' right to vote and to do so in a way that they will best be able to understand.

While counties and the Secretary do not specifically endorse the bill in its current form, both parties have given me their feedback on the bill. They have concerns about what this transition might look like. There are many questions about how to best have the translation done, when will citizens first be able to access information in the language they choose, or how will this affect the communication between the Secretary of State's office and the hardworking clerk offices around the state.

I take their feedback to heart, as they are the people who do this work day in and day out. The Association of Counties and Secretary Brown's office have committed to work with me on the current bill in drafting an amendment that will incorporate feedback from all stakeholders whether it is the Secretary of State's office, county clerks, or most importantly our voting citizens. We have come together and recognized a need for a change in the system, and together, along with other stakeholders, we will work to find the best next step in creating a plan that will work for everyone involved.

Best Regards,



Joseph Gallegos

