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My name is Reyna Lopez, Civic Engagement Director at Causa, Oregon Oregon's Immigrant Right Organization. Our programs include civic participation, community education, leadership development, public communications, and policy advocacy. These programs address issues that impact the everyday lives of Latino immigrants and their families such as affordable and accessible education, housing, and health care, living wage jobs, transportation, safety, and immigration. Non-partisan, volunteer and community driven, voter registration is a major part of our Civic Engagement programs. We prioritize this because we know that in order to get heard in our democracy, eligible Latino voters must thrive to learn about the issues and cast their votes for those issues and individuals they believe in.

Latinos in Oregon and nationwide have come across many barriers, in participating in our democracy. Due to our communities ongoing population growth, Latinos comprise a greater share of the nation's eligible voters than they did just a few years ago—11.0% this year, up from 9.5% in 2008 and 8.2% in 2004 (Lopez and Taylor, 2009). However, the turnout rate of eligible Latino voters has historically lagged that of whites and blacks by substantial margins. There are several factors in this, but one major factor that Causa has found a long with many leading Civic Engagement organizations nationwide is voter registration. Since 1994, Causa has registered many first time Latino voters. Just this last year, Causa, in coalition with our community partners, APANO, CIO, Oregon Voice, and Voz Hispana Chavista, registered over 4000 New Americans to vote. As you can imagine, in the Latino community it is a lot more difficult to achieve such a number. Some factors are language barriers, the fact that our community is of mixed immigrations status, lack of knowledge about how of the voter registration process, and because the American born Latinos are really young.

Causa is about to reach 4,000 immigrant voters each year with our partners organizations, but there are an estimated 450,000 Latinos in the state of Oregon, many of them eligible to vote. Causa ends up spending time and resources to train staff, and be the trusted messenger to register our Latino community to vote. Because we are a non-profit organization, Causa and many other organizations, I believe will benefit from automatic voter registration for eligible citizens at the DMV. This would allow us to not spend scarce resources on voter registration, and dedicate more time on other pressing issues amongst our members.

While Causa vigorously trains our staff and volunteers to make sure that all of the people we register to vote are eligible, and although voter registration rates of ineligible individuals are zero to very low, I believe that this will also reduce fears in certain groups that people in the community that are not eligible to vote will mistakenly register.

Civic participation will most definitely increase, especially in those communities in which voter registration is a significant barrier. During elections, I can tell you many stories, of families calling the Causa office, asking what they need to do to vote, and my heart breaks when I tell eligible mothers,

daughters, fathers and sons, that the voter registration deadline passed, and they will not be able to participate in there democracy.

Causa and many other people in the Latino and Immigrant community, value the right to vote. Many of our members it taken years for them to be able to access this right, many people in our Latino community have died before ever being able to access it. Voter registration is a barrier in accessing a the most important right as a US Citizen. Please, vote "YES" on HB 3521

Reyna Lopez

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