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To: House Rules Committee
From: Kate Titus, Common Cause Oregon
Re: Support for HJR 17 & HB 2686

Common Cause Oregon supports HJR 17 to establish an independent redistricting commission and HB 2686 to address redistricting distortions caused by how we count prison populations.

Common Cause is a 43-year-old nonpartisan organization that works to safeguard and improve the democratic process. During the most recent redistricting process, Common Cause worked to improve participation in the hearings, particularly by groups underrepresented in the political process. We also testified with suggestions for the House and Senate redistricting committees and shared our perspective in guest opinion pieces in *The Oregonian* and *Portland Tribune*. Following redistricting, in February 2012, we released a report: Oregon's 2011 Redistricting: Successes, Concerns, and Recommended Improvements, which can be found on our website, <http://www.commoncause.org/site/pp.asp?c=dkLNK1MQIwG&b=6549765>, and which applauds the successes of Oregon's 2011 process, while still emphasizing the need for redistricting reform, and laying out a number of specific recommendations.

Common Cause supports an independent redistricting commission. The drawing of district lines is a process which affects the relative voting strength of different communities within districts and the resulting viability of candidates. It is inappropriate to have legislators directly overseeing this process. We recognize that assigning this role to an independent commission will not entirely remove politics from what is an inherently political process. However, it can contribute to a less politicized process, and also change the perception of legislators choosing their own voters which undermines credibility of the Legislature. We also support eliminating what is sometimes referred to as prison gerrymandering, the inflation of representation of citizens in some districts over others due to where prisoners are counted.

In addition, I would like to emphasize several recommendations covered in our report:

- No matter who draws the lines, reform should not weaken Oregon's redistricting criteria, which are among the clearest and most detailed among states.
- It should be a top priority to end the "wink and a nod" use of political data behind closed doors. Inclusion of political data is useful, but should be a transparent part of the process, available to the public, not a backroom means to sweetheart gerrymandering.
- We emphasize the importance of public participation in the process, particularly holding hearings on draft maps. It's a hollow exercise to hold hearings before maps are drafted, if not followed by hearings afterward on the actual draft maps.