

**TESTIMONY OF DANIEL MEEK ON HB 2079:
OPPOSITION TO RELAXATION OF NEPOTISM RESTRICTIONS**

before the House Committee on Rules

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I and the Oregon Progressive Party oppose Section 2 of HB 2079, which reads:

SECTION 2. ORS 244.175 is amended to read:

As used in ORS 244.177 and 244.179:

- (1) "Governing body" has the meaning given that term in ORS 192.610.
- [(2) "*Member of the household*" means any person who resides with the public official.]
- [(3)](2) "Public body" has the meaning given that term in ORS 174.109.
- [(4) "*Relative*" means the spouse of the public official, any children of the public official or of the public official's spouse, and brothers, sisters, half brothers, half sisters, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, stepparents, stepchildren or parents of the public official or of the public official's spouse.]

ORS 244.177 - 179 address nepotism in public office. HB 2079 would relax the restrictions so that public officials can accord benefits to more of their relatives than is currently allowed. HB 2079 eliminates the definition of "member of the household" and the specific definition of "relative" that applies to the nepotism restrictions.

It appears that the elimination of the "member of the household" definition in ORS 244.175 is immaterial, because the same definition is provided, applicable to the entire Chapter 244, in ORS 244.020(10).

But HB 2079 does substantially change the definition of "relative" applicable to the nepotism restrictions. It eliminates from that definition the public official's half brothers, half sisters, aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews, replacing the above italicized definition with this:

- (a) The spouse, parent, stepparent, child, stepchild, sibling, stepsibling or in-law of the public official or candidate;**
- (b) The parent, stepparent, child, stepchild, sibling, stepsibling or in-law of the spouse of the public official or candidate;**

Some dictionaries define "sibling" as including only "a person's brother or sister," not a half brother or half sister. See COLLINS ENGLISH DICTIONARY (HarperCollins 2003). The new definition covers "stepsiblings," but not all half brothers or half sisters are stepsiblings.

We see no reason to remove half brothers, half sisters, aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews from the nepotism restrictions.

HB also eliminates the clear listing of the covered in-laws (brothers-in law, etc.) with the generic "in-laws." That term is often used in ordinary speech as referring only to the person's mother-in-law and father-in-law. We see no reason to remove the existing, clear definition and replace it with a vague definition.

We will appreciate the deletion of Section 2 from this bill.