



519 SW Park Avenue, Suite 602
Portland, Oregon 97205
(503) 841-6865
www.healthydemocracy.org

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Chair Hoyle and members of the House Rules Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding Senate Bill 1544. I am the Executive Director of Healthy Democracy, the nonprofit organization that developed the Citizens' Initiative Review (CIR) and currently provides funding, project management, and administrative support for the program.

The CIR brings together a panel of 24 randomly selected, demographically balanced Oregonians and gives them the time and resources to review a ballot measure. They hear from pro and con campaigns, call upon neutral experts, and deliberate based on the merits of the statewide ballot measure under review. Their results are published as a one page "Citizens' Statement" to supplement information in the Voters' Guide.

The benefits of the CIR in providing voters with a unique and useful source of information have been extensively studied and confirmed by independent academic teams funded by the National Science Foundation (2010) and the Kettering Foundation (2012). Over half of Oregon voters read a CIR statement in 2012, gaining new and important information about the choices on the ballot. The International Association for Public Participation recognized these impressive results by awarding the CIR its national and international project of the year awards for 2012.

While lawmakers have access to public hearings about proposed legislation, the ballot initiative process asks citizens to vote with little information other than what campaigns provide. While citizens don't want less democracy, they do want better information at election time. We're proud of the fact that the CIR is capable of providing the information voters are looking for when it comes to evaluating statewide ballot measures. It's an achievement that the leadership of the Oregon Legislature made possible in 2011.

Senate Bill 1544 will allow the CIRC to continue its work and increase the efficiency of the Citizens' Initiative Review so that we can continue to provide voters with quality unbiased information about the measures they will be voting on. As one panelist from Phoenix, OR wrote, "Being a member of the panel gave me a chance to sit down with regular folks like myself and have an honest, thoughtful discussion about the future of our state." Ensuring that these honest, thoughtful discussions help inform our elections is what the Citizens' Initiative Review is all about.

I ask you to support Senate Bill 1544. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Tyrone Reitman
Executive Director
Healthy Democracy