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March 9, 2015

To: House Rules Committee
Representative Val Hoyle, Chair

From: James Ofsink
Chair, City Club of Portland Redistricting Committee
Chair, Redistricting Matters Coalition

Re: Support for HB 2945

The Redistricting Matters Coalition and the City Club of Portland support HB 2945 and a transparent, publicly reviewable redistricting process.

HB 2945, when amended will take an important step towards including the public in a process that has had little opportunity for oversight in the past.

Since at least 1991 in advance of each redistricting, Legislative Leadership has made a decision whether to include election data from the voter file in the redistricting database used to create maps. The decision *not* to include this information created a two-tiered system. The first tier consisted of those entities with a strong interest in specific redistricting outcomes, who had the means and motive to pay for the expensive enterprise of mapping the data in the voter file to the census block boundaries. This group could then use the combined model to produce and analyze draft maps. All other groups, including the media and the public, were in a less privileged tier with no ability to review changes to the demographic and political makeup of districts.

The amended HB 2945 has several components, the first of which directs the state to participate in the Census' Block Boundary Suggestion Program. Providing our existing precinct boundaries to the Census as suggestions for census block boundaries, means that the census blocks will match our precincts. This small administrative change will greatly reduce the work (and cost) required for anyone wanting to correlate voter information to draft redistricting maps. Staff members for major party caucuses, interest groups, and the media all welcomed this change in discussions leading up to this hearing.

The second component of the amended HB 2945 requires that the voter information (aggregated to the census block level) be made public in connection to draft and final redistricting maps. This allows media and the general public to have access to the base voter information used historically behind closed doors in determining district lines. This will allow for a meaningful external review of the maps and they way they change communities of representation in Oregon.

Legislators involved in the 2011 redistricting process described in interviews that the political registration data was a key negotiation item used to successfully produce the final district maps. While the 2011 Legislative Assembly is worthy of praise and commendation for their historic work in passing a final set of plans, it is unfortunate that in Oregon a crucial part of the success was divorced so completely from any public review. Redistricting is a fundamentally political function, but by increasing transparency, welcoming outside review, and removing the disparate tiers of access we believe the final product will be better for all Oregonians.

We thank Rep. Parrish and the Rules Committee for considering this important issue and hope that you will agree that now is the time to establish the structural framework for an open and successful process in 2021. Passing HB 2945 will be an important step towards that end and we encourage the Rules Committee to advance this bill out of committee.

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The City Club of Portland is a nonprofit, nonpartisan education and research based civic organization dedicated to community service, public affairs and leadership development. In 2011-12 we studied the redistricting process in Oregon and nationally and developed several ideas to improve our state's process.

The Redistricting Matters Coalition is a group of organizations that recognize the fundamental importance of the redistricting process and advocate reforms in Oregon. Learn more at: www.redistrictingmatters.org