

March 9, 2014

To: Oregon House Committee on Rules, Representative Val Hoyle, chair

From: AARP Oregon

Re: Support for House Bill 2944 and House Bill 2974, requiring public hearings on redistricting plans

AARP is a national, non-profit, non-partisan organization representing and advising more than 37 million members age 50 and over on matters of health care, financial security, consumer protection, livable communities, government integrity and civic engagement. In Oregon, we have a large membership spread through the state, and many volunteers active on public and social issues.

AARP believes that reforms to redistricting are necessary and desirable, and its policies on government integrity and civic engagement speak directly to the features of House Bills 2944 and 2974. We believe that transparency in government is essential, that openness is a fundamental feature of democracies. Government must operate in the public view.

Redistricting policies and procedures should be transparent and open and provide a meaningful opportunity for interested parties and the public to participate effectively.

To that end, we support House Bills 2944 and 2974, which would require the Legislature to hold a certain number of public hearings before a draft redistricting plan are published and five hearings after release, at diverse locations within the state. The composition and configuration of political districts matter a great deal, and the public must have the opportunity to examine, comment on and challenge if necessary any proposal for redistricting that the Legislature or another designated redistricting agent designs. This concept is enhanced by the requirement in both bills that video conferencing be made available so that people living in remote areas might testify.

The 2011 Legislature did an admirable job of redistricting, thanks in no small part to the fact that redistricting leaders held 16 hearings around the state seeking comments on creation of the plan and the plan itself. But nowhere in current state statute are such hearings required.

AARP recommends the best features of House Bill 2944 and House Bill 2974 be combined and that the Rules Committee passes and recommends support of an amended public hearings bill.

Respectfully,

Steven Carter
Volunteer and Executive Council member, AARP Oregon