

Testimony on SJR5

Madam chair, vice chair, members of the committee, my name is Reverend Joseph Santos-Lyons, and I am the Executive Director of the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon, known as APANO. We are the oldest and largest statewide Asian and Pacific Islander advocacy organization.

APANO strongly supports the Senate Joint Resolution 5, to strengthen our democratic process by setting reasonable contribution limits for candidates.

As an organization, APANO has long sought to raise the voices of people of color, immigrant communities, and Oregonians of many different backgrounds. But one of the biggest structural barriers to this has been the role of money in politics.

The lack of a basic contribution limit has led to exponential increases in the cost of a campaign to serve as an elected official in Oregon. This creates a significant racial disparity, as it places a disproportionate amount of power in the hands of a handful of millionaires. When one or two millionaires can pump major donations into campaigns, they undermine our basic democratic principles - one person one vote. We have seen this affect both Republican and Democrat. And the most successful candidates often have wide networks of wealthy people who are willing to financially support their campaigns.

This dynamic makes it very difficult for low-income communities, and communities that have been historically disenfranchised, to have their voices heard equally in our political process. If you need to have a wealthy network to be a candidate, people who don't have that network struggle to run an effective campaign. And because many communities of color in Oregon do not have access to those networks, and experience higher rates of poverty, it is hard for a person of color to run for office.



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Oregon is a diverse state, and it needs to have more diversity in its elected positions. If we can limit the amount that a wealthy donor can give to a candidate, we can help to bring down the costs of running for office. And that will allow young people, people of color, people from both low-income and rural communities, and people of different backgrounds to participate in our democracy by serving as candidates.

Every community should be able to vote for a true representative in their government, who understands their experiences because they have also shared those experiences. For this reason, among many others, the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon urges you to pass Senate Joint Resolution 5.