

April 29, 2015

Dear Chair Rosenbaum and Senate Rules Committee members:

I am writing in support of **HB 2974** which would require public redistricting hearings before and after reapportionment plans are proposed. HB 2974 recently passed with a strong bipartisan majority in the House and deserves the same support in the Senate.

As a member of the Portland City Club's 2011 Research Committee on Redistricting, I followed the process of the 2011 Joint Redistricting Committee closely. This included attending three different public hearings and following others online. Among the many strengths in the redistricting process followed in 2011 was the fact that they held multiple public hearings around the state, thirteen prior to the release of the proposed maps and three after.

The thirteen hearings prior to the release of maps gave citizens, officials, and interest groups around the state an opportunity to weigh in on the process offering information and their perceptions of the desired outcome of redistricting. The inclusion of video links to additional areas added to the opportunity for public input. These hearings also gave the Joint Committee members considerable time and experience working together as they gathered public input. The three hearings after the release of the proposed reapportionment plan, though offered in a very brief timespan, did provide public officials and the public opportunities to comment on the actual proposed maps.

I believe that both kinds of hearings are vital to an open and fair redistricting process. The hearings post release of actual proposed maps are often short-changed due to tight timelines. However, these hearings play a different and vital role in that they allow for input on specifics of an actual proposal. It is at this stage that mistakes or miscalculations can be pointed out and corrected before reapportionment plan is approved by the legislature. HB 2974 sets a strong expectation that such hearings will be held while also recognizing the challenges that can arise with short deadlines at the end of a session.

As a result of studying the redistricting process in Oregon and in other states around the nation I came to these understandings:

- Redistricting is important. It sets the boundaries that can determine political outcomes for a decade.
- Redistricting can be a highly charged and political process that can potentially arouse suspicions of political manipulation by one side or the other.
- It is therefore vital that this process, as much as possible be perceived open, transparent and fair. This would include allowing opportunities for meaningful public input in different areas throughout the state.

The 2011 Joint Redistricting Committee should be commended for the hearings they held. But, holding public hearings, up to this point, has been a matter of tradition, not a required feature of redistricting. We don't know how future redistricting efforts will be conducted. That will depend on the personalities involved and the political dynamics of the time. HB 2974 would insure that statewide public hearings accessible to citizens around the state will continue to be an essential ingredient of future redistricting efforts.

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