



Redistricting Matters

April 30, 2015

To: Senate Rules Committee
Senator Diane Rosenbaum, Chair
Senator Ted Ferrioli, Vice-Chair

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

Re: HB 2974

The Redistricting Matters Coalition and the City Club of Portland support HB 2974 and an open, fair, and publicly-responsive redistricting process.

The public plays several key roles in the state's current redistricting process and we believe those roles will be preserved and enhanced through the passage of this bill.

The first role played by community members, at least over the last three decades, has been to provide initial input to those who draw the lines. Oregon's nearly four million residents have a better sense of the changes and developments in their neighborhoods than the 60 state representatives, 30 state senators, or 5 members of Congress who represent them. This is not a failing of representation, but a necessary aspect of our system that assigns 1 state representative for 66,000 people.

In 2011, hundreds of individuals testified to a variety of issues they felt were important in preserving and enhancing their community's representation. Our coalition attended several of the hearings and observed testimonies varying from the importance of watersheds, to key transportation links, and ethnic identity.

When we interviewed legislators involved in the 2011 redistricting committee, they attested the initial value of these hearings in focusing their work. They also noted that the hearings brought them to areas of the state they would not have otherwise visited and provided the committee with dedicated time together to consider the unique characteristics of each of Oregon's districts.

A second role the public plays, and one that would be enhanced through the passage of this bill, is correcting unintended errors. With the many competing criteria and priorities of redistricting, it is only natural that officials make small, unintended mistakes that can easily be compounded for a decade. In some cases these unintended mistakes remove voter privacy by producing unique ballots for small sets of homes; in other cases they produce administrative difficulties for county elections officers. These mistakes can be found and easily corrected if draft maps, once produced, are also subject to statewide hearings.

A more open and public process allows community members, academics, and the media to review the draft maps and suggest fixes based on real proposals.

City Club believes strongly in the benefits of citizen involvement in our public processes. Educated citizens are the cornerstone of a great society, but only if they are able to actively participate in ways that meaningfully capitalize on individual's expert knowledge. Public hearings provide one way for Oregonians to participate directly in the redistricting process and should be a permanent facet of our system. We applaud the Legislature for reviewing this key issue and taking steps to safeguard and improve one of the best aspects of our redistricting process.

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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

