

February 4, 2016

Senator Diane Rosenbaum, Chair
Senate Committee on Rules
Oregon Legislative Assembly

Re: SB 1586

Chair Rosenbaum and Members of the Committee:

OSPIRG supports SB 1586. This legislation will encourage greater public engagement with Oregon's democratic process, both on and off campus, and further advance the critical role of Oregon's colleges and universities in fostering civic engagement and informed citizenship.

Oregon's public institutions of higher education have an indispensable role in shaping the state's citizens and future leaders. This is reflected in the mission statements of Oregon's top public universities, which cite goals including "fostering the next generation of transformational leaders and informed participants in the global community" (University of Oregon) and promoting "economic, social, cultural and environmental progress for the people of Oregon, the nation and the world" (Oregon State University). As lynchpin institutions in our state, public colleges and universities have an opportunity to educate, inform and engage their students as citizens, not just in the classroom.

By taking a few common-sense steps to expand voter registration and civic participation outreach on campus, and making it easier for students to vote by clarifying address requirements for students housed on campus, SB 1586 will strengthen the public purpose of Oregon's institutions of higher learning.

SB 1586 will also enable broader public participation in Oregon's democracy off campus by allowing citizens to submit vote-by-mail ballots without the need for a postage stamp. The cost of a stamp represents only a tiny expense for most Oregonians, but removing this small barrier will make it that much easier for the public to participate in the democratic process. We believe that the benefits in convenience and increased participation will be well worth the modest but real cost to the state of implementing this provision.

SB 1586 is a common-sense measure that will strengthen Oregon's democracy, and we urge your support.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jesse Ellis O'Brien
OSPIRG Policy Director