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February 4th, 2016

To: Senate Rules and Executive Appointments Committee
From: Tabitha Pitzer
RE: SB 1586, Civic Engagement Bill

Chair Rosenbaum, Vice-Chair Ferrioli, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Tabitha Pitzer and I am a second year student at Oregon State University, and I am here with the Oregon Student Association to urge your support of SB 1586.

SB 1586 directs public universities and community colleges to increase voter registration access and information through instructed collaboration with campus student governments, or student government equivalents. The bill also calls for ballot drop off sites to be closer and more accessible to college campuses. Lastly, it modernizes the vote by mail system so that all ballots can be returned for free by business reply mail for each election held in this state.

Not only am I student at OSU, I also work for the student government, ASOSU, as the Executive Director of Government Relations. My job is essentially to ensure that students are politically aware and politically engaged. During my time serving students in this position, the amount of barriers we have faced to access students is discouraging. Every year our organization struggles to reach students in university housing, student orientations, and beginning of the year activities.

We currently face restricted access to some of these locations or events, and we do not always have university support to access these places. We are always competing with other departments or organizations to engage students, and this severely impacts our ability to do our work. For example, every year at OSU the university hosts a new student picnic where first year students have the opportunity to engage with student organizations on campus and learn about the services available to them. ASOSU tables at this event annually to educate students about our organization and to register them to vote, but this year was different. This year the new student picnic was placed in the hands of the athletics department. The athletics department decided that no other organizations were allowed to table at the event, and that ASOSU was no exception to this rule.



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Due to restricted access to participate in this university event, we lost a wonderful opportunity to politically engage our first year students. We need help to ensure that we are able to access our constituents, we need help to ensure that we are able to target students where they are most likely to get involved, whether it be on campus or in the classroom. We need help to ensure that voter registration, education, and ballot drop off is as accessible as possible. Students are busy. We work, we go to school, we have homework, we are engaged in our community, we have families, we struggle to find time to sleep, and we struggle to find time to be politically engaged. The current barriers we face only make political engagement more difficult, increasing accessibility is key to ensuring students have a voice in our state.

SB 1586 ensures that young Oregonians have every opportunity to fulfill their civic duty and become engaged citizens by requiring access to students, close ballot drop off sites, and a completely free voting process. This bill shows that Oregon values every Oregonians voice in our democracy.

This is why I support SB 1586, and encourage this committee to pass it.

Please remember my story when voting on this bill. Thank you for letting me speak with you today.

Sincerely,

Tabitha Pitzer

Oregon State University

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