

To: The Honorable Diane Rosenbaum, Chair, & Members
Senate Committee on Rules & Executive Appointments

Re: SB 1573

Dear Chair Rosenbaum & Committee Members:

SB 1573 is the latest assault by the Oregon Homebuilders Association (OHBA) and its allies in a decades-long crusade to revoke citizens' right to vote on annexations in 32 Oregon communities with a combined population of close to 600,000. **SB 1573 is bad public policy and we strongly urge you to reject it.**

These citizens gave themselves the right, through the initiative process, to vote on discretionary annexation proposals in their communities. Nearly all these "voter annexation" initiatives passed by wide margins. Corvallis voters passed the first one in 1976. Ever since then, development interests have been trying, thus far unsuccessfully, to void them.

All previous efforts during the past 40 years to revoke these local decisions have been rejected, for good reason, by the courts and the Legislature.

OHBA drafted the language for SB 1573 in 2014. Sen. Chris Edwards agreed to sponsor it as SBs 497 & 498 in 2015. Sen. Edwards, to his credit, apparently had second thoughts and did not allow a hearing on either bill. At the 11th hour, the language was allowed to be "stuffed" into a bill we wrote, HB 2938-A, in the Senate Committee on Business & Transportation. The -3 version ended up in Senate Rules at Sine Die. It has resurfaced as SB 1573.

WE WISH TO COMMENT ON SOME OF THE ARGUMENTS YOU ARE LIKELY TO HEAR FROM THE PROPONENTS:

Claim: *Citizens regularly reject annexation proposals in these communities.*

Fact: The vast majority of these pass. 8 of them were on the ballot in our member cities in November 2014. All passed handily. On the rare occasions where an annexation is rejected, as was the case in Sherwood in November 2015, it was because the community simply could not afford it. Senator Thatcher has some background on this particular case and may wish to comment further.

Claim: *"Voter annexation" violates state land use law.*

Fact: As you can see in the attachment, voting on annexations is "not controlled by nor subject to state land use law."

Claim: *SB 1573 would apply in only a limited number of cases.*

Fact: The annexations addressed by SB 1573 comprise the most common type that occur in Oregon. Additionally, the bill would deny citizens in all Oregon communities the long-established right to this local control measure.

Claim: *“Voter annexation” leads to unaffordable housing.*

Fact: There is no hard evidence to support this. Portland and the coast have some of the state’s highest housing costs. Neither has “voter annexation.” There are a number of factors that lead to soaring property prices. There is no evidence we’ve seen that shows “voter annexation” as being among them.

Claim: *This bill needs an “Emergency” clause*

Fact: There is no “Emergency.” Voter annexation has been part of the Oregon landscape for 40 years!

Please reject this attack on citizens’ rights, just as your predecessors have repeatedly – and wisely – done. Thank you for listening.

Respectfully,

Jerry J. Ritter

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