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Testimony of Steven Carter, AARP Oregon volunteer
Regarding HB 2578, the small donor election bill
Oregon House Rules Committee
Feb. 28, 2017

Chair Williamson, members of the House Rules Committee,

Good afternoon. My name is Steven Carter. I am from Portland, I am a volunteer with AARP Oregon and I have a long and passionate interest in good government and democratic ideals.

I am here to lend AARP's support to the idea of empowering small donors in our Oregon elections, and I salute Rep. Rayfield for bringing this bill forward.

AARP long has promoted government integrity, civic engagement and efforts to reduce the power of special interests and raise the voices of everyday citizens in our government. I don't have to remind you that public trust in government is not high. To quote from our AARP's National Policy Book, which is produced by volunteers, "The public perceives government as being less responsive to its concerns than to those of special interests."

AARP, with more than a half-million members in Oregon, believes that small donor campaigns and elections have the power to raise the voice and influence of Oregonians across the state, from Ontario to Newport, from Ashland to Astoria. And as small donor elections magnify the power of regular people, so too do they have the power to widen the spectrum of our representative government, by giving the ability of women, minorities, people from outlying areas, the wherewithal to run for and successfully be elected to office. I don't have to tell you that it costs a bundle to run for the Legislature or governor or secretary of state in Oregon.

We must not limit our candidates for office to only those people with money or the connections to run. That skews our representation and furthers the idea that government is run by and for the wealthy and well-connected.

Small donor elections have the added benefit of giving candidates the time and incentive to interact with and hear from ordinary Oregonians. Instead of dialing for dollars, they can meet with potential constituents to hear their concerns and aspirations. In New York City, which has had a small donor elections program for nearly 30 years, research has shown that donations come in from a wider geographic area of the city, diversity among office holders has increased and there is more citizen participation in political campaigns. That's civic engagement, and that's good.

AARP
Real Possibilities

AARP would like to see a small donor elections program with strong oversight to maintain transparency both in contributions and expenditures, and establishment of strong penalties for any violation of the law. That is necessary to ensure public confidence in spending public money on elections. AARP looks forward to helping create a strong, transparent, enforceable small donor election law in Oregon.

Thank you.