

To: Senate Rules Committee
From: AFT-Oregon
Date: March 6, 2017
Re: Support for Senate Bill 683

Chair Burdick, members of the committee,

On behalf of the American Federation of Teachers-Oregon, I respectfully urge your support for Senate Bill 683, which would require that the state pay for business reply mail postage for all ballots. AFT-Oregon is committed to expanding access to the democratic process for all Oregonians and we believe this bill is an important step in that direction.

Oregon has long been a leader in voter access policies. Most importantly, we were the first state in the nation to institute vote by mail for all elections. As a state, we are committed to ensuring that every eligible voter has the opportunity to vote and have their voice be heard as part of our democratic process.

We believe that in order to continue that commitment, Oregon needs to pass Senate Bill 683, requiring the state to pay for postage for all ballots using business reply mail. This bill would not only increase voter participation in Oregon, but it would specifically benefit two groups who historically have had to provide additional postage in order to return their ballots: Oregonians with disabilities, and Oregonians serving in the military who are stationed overseas.

As it stands now, an individual with a visual impairment who requests a special ballot may be required to provide additional postage beyond a single stamp. Of the more than 6,000 Oregonians registered to vote who serve in our nation's military 1 in 6 of them serve and receive their ballot to an overseas address, meaning they must provide additional postage for their ballot to be delivered – to say nothing of the time it takes for their ballot to travel to the U.S.

What's more, research shows that 42 percent of new registrants – including those voters who registered via the DMV - don't have a postage stamp at home. From young folks to new parents to seniors living in rural Oregon, many Oregonians no longer conduct business via U.S. Mail and thus do not routinely have stamps on hand.

We believe our democracy is at its healthiest when everyone can participate. Requiring postage be paid on Oregon ballots ensures that no Oregonian has to worry about postage in order to vote. We hope you will support this important voter access policy, and vote yes on SB 683.

Sincerely,



Marcus Swift
Director of Political and Legislative Affairs
AFT-Oregon