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To: House Rules Committee
From: Common Cause Oregon
Date: March 16, 2017
Re: Support for HB 2869, HB 2871, and HB 2872

Common Cause submits this testimony in support of HB 2869, HB 2871, and HB 2872.

Recognizing that as a diverse nation of both immigrants and native peoples, with a variety of language traditions, we know that not all U.S. citizens speak English fluently as a first language. For the purposes of voting, particularly on complex issues, a completely mono-lingual election system does not serve us well.

These three bills each provide opportunity for Oregon to strengthen our election system to better serve us all, by reducing barriers for those for whom English is not a first or fluent language.

All voters should be able to access voter information and assistance in their native language, as is useful to them to participate as fully informed voters. Allowing voters to request voting materials in a language other than English when they register to vote and when they update their registration, is one good way to ensure that elections officials and relevant community groups have information to meet the language needs of these voters. Since many state agencies have already developed sophisticated and up-to-date systems to track language data, the Secretary of State should have the ability to draw on this existing information. The Secretary of State should also be empowered to study additional options so that we can identify best practices for serving diverse language needs.

Thank you for considering ways to ensure that all Oregon voters, regardless of their proficiency in the English language, are able to participate as fully informed voters.