

Co-Chairs Senator Manning and Representative Smith, members of the committee,

For the record my name is Courtney Graham, and I am here today on behalf of the Oregon Bus Project to testify about House Bill 5536, the Secretary of State's budget proposal. Specifically, I am here to testify about proposed changes and cuts to the Elections Division that were discussed in last week's hearing, including a suggestion that the printed Voter's Pamphlet be eliminated if budget cuts were necessary.

During that hearing last week, Elections Director Steve Trout said, "the election could go on without it, if it had to," referring to the Voter's Pamphlet.

Respectfully, we disagree. The Oregon Voters' Pamphlet is the single most important source of accurate and impartial information about the candidates and ballot measures voters must decide on every election. It is central to our democracy and essential to the process. A top priority of the Secretary of State should be to ensure every Oregonian receives it in their mailbox, just like their ballots. We appreciate the clarification sent out by the Secretary of State regarding this issue, however we still have concerns and hope that we can continue to work together to improve voter access.

The Secretary of State has said that he is committed to making sure every eligible voter has the opportunity to access the ballot - we agree wholeheartedly with that goal. He has also said that he wants to focus in particular on historically disadvantaged and disenfranchised communities, such as those whose primary language is not English, or recent immigrants. Again, we wholeheartedly agree.

However, our concern is that this budget does not reflect those shared values. Among a host of changes, this budget proposes an increase in staff in the Candidate and Campaign Services division - not the Voter Registration and Voter Services division. We also know that two nonpartisan staff who were previously tasked with administering the Oregon Motor Voter program and serving voters with disabilities were let go and their positions changed; we are concerned that voters will see the quality of service diminish if they have to rely on political appointments in the Executive staff. Elections staff have played a critical role in doing much more than outreach, they have driven plans to ensure ballot access for all Oregonians, including many disenfranchised communities.

This budget also reflects a shift of important Help America Vote Act (HAVA) funds away from funding those positions that serve voters with disabilities and other disenfranchised groups, toward one-time technology upgrades that have not been explained or vetted by stakeholders or this body.

As a youth engagement organization, we support proposals that helps improve access to the ballot and make voting more accessible to all Oregonians. We hope that we can work together to craft a budget that reflects those priorities.