



**Testimony on SB 5536**

March 27, 2017

Ways and Means Joint SubCommittee on General Government

Chris Hewitt

Co-Chairs Sen. James Manning Jr. and Rep. Greg Smith,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) regarding the financial administration of the Secretary of State branch. ONA represents 15,000 members providing care throughout the state. We have a long history of supporting robust voter education and civic engagement policies that help to ensure broad access to our state's vital democratic processes.

To this end, we are deeply concerned as it relates to recent communications from Oregon's Secretary of State agency leaders about the potential for budget cuts that would reduce or eliminate the distribution of voter pamphlet information regarding our elections. The Oregon Voters' Pamphlet is the single most important source of accurate and objective information about the candidates and ballot measures that voters must decide on each election. This program has long been fundamental to our democracy and remains one of the most basic services incumbent on Oregon's Secretary of State to carry out in serving our citizens.

Oregon has a strong history of increasing access to the ballot and electoral information; however this proposed change would have the opposite effect of rolling back years of work and nationally recognized success of improving voter turnout. ONA recognizes that Oregon's current budget climate has forced agencies to seek avenues to trim their budgets, but saving limited funds by reducing access to essential elections information is not a viable proposal. Cutting voters' pamphlet services would greatly damage the civic health of all our communities while disproportionately impacting low-income and rural Oregon voters, who especially rely on this resource to engage in our elections.

Oregon's nurses understand the value of a strong and vigorous democratic process that allows all voters to engage and have a voice in our electoral system. A vital measure of a healthy and truly thriving community is the ability for individuals to take ownership in important governance decisions and pursue civic participation. We agree with the members of this committee who have questioned why the voters' pamphlet- of all things – would be first on the chopping block.

ONA encourages the Secretary to find other meaningful budget solutions that don't otherwise discourage voter participation.