



**Testimony of Kimberly McCullough, Legislative Director
In Support of SB 683 with the -5 Amendments
Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on General Government
June 27, 2017**

Co-Chair Manning, Co-Chair Smith, and Members of the Committee:

The American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon¹ supports SB 683 with the -5 amendments, which would give counties the option to provide pre-paid postage envelopes for all ballots to Oregonian voters and cover the full cost of special ballots for individuals with disabilities. As a nonpartisan organization dedicated to preservation and enhancement of civil liberties and civil rights, the ACLU of Oregon supports efforts that promote access to the ballot and protect the fundamental right to vote.

While some states are trying to make it harder to vote, Oregon has been a leader in honoring the right to vote by increasing access to the ballot. Most importantly, Oregon was the first state in the country to implement vote-by-mail for all elections. In 2014, 38 percent of ballots were returned by mail.

To continue our commitment to voting rights and democratic elections, Oregon should pass SB 683 with the -5 amendments. We support this bill not only because it will increase voter turnout, but also because it will increase access for Oregonians with disabilities. Currently, an individual with a disability who requests a special ballot must provide additional postage for their larger ballot.

We also support SB 683 with the -5 amendments because we know that postage can be a barrier to voting by mail, particularly for Oregonians living in poverty. Research shows that 42 percent of first-time voters—including those voters who registered via the DMV—don't have a postage stamp at home. Many of these voters, particularly those living in rural areas, don't live near a ballot drop box. For people struggling to get by, working multiple jobs, and trying to put food on the table for their families, finding time and money to buy postage or travel to a ballot drop box can decrease these individuals' likelihood to vote.

Democracy is at its healthiest when everyone can vote without barriers. While we supported the bill in its original form, the ACLU of Oregon sees SB 683 with the -5 amendments as a positive alternative to move in the right direction in increasing voter access and participation. Allowing our counties to have the option to provide postage on Oregon ballots ensures that voters in our state do not have to worry about postage when casting their future votes.

For these reasons, the ACLU of Oregon urges you to support SB 683 with the -5 amendments.

¹ The American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon (ACLU of Oregon) is a nonprofit organization with more than 43,000 members in the State of Oregon.