

**TO: Subcommittee on General Government**

**DA: June 27, 2017**

**Re: Senate Bill 683**



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

My name is Nikki Fisher and I am the Executive Director of the Oregon Bus Project. Our mission is to make politics accessible for young people through mobilization, empowerment and building community, all while making Oregon a better place for everyone. I write today in strong support of Senate Bill 683 because the Bus Project believes every Oregon voter, regardless of where they live or whether they require a special ballot, should have an opportunity to weigh in on issues of critical importance to them and to their community.

While we still believe the right thing for Oregon to do is to pass SB 683 in its current form, we acknowledge that sometimes it takes time to implement great policies, and that often small steps must be taken on a longer road toward progress. With that in mind, we are glad to support the -5 amendment to SB 683.

As part of our work in support of this bill, we met with disability rights advocates who told us that voters with visual disabilities who have to request special ballots often have to provide additional postage because their ballots weigh more than a single stamp allows. Under current Oregon law, even if an elections official wanted to provide a stamp to that voter, they are prohibited from doing so. Senate Bill 683-5 would explicitly permit a county elections official to provide postage to a voter who requests a large format ballot as a result of their disability.

Additionally, counties are technically prohibited by state law from paying for postage for electors if they choose to. The state should allow counties to decide for themselves if they want to provide postage. The experience of other states tells us that this is not only appropriate, smart policy but that it also has a positive impact on voter turnout. The best example is from King County in Washington. We've submitted an article to OLIS summarizing the findings, but briefly King County Elections piloted pre-paid postage in two special elections this spring, and saw an increase in voter turnout of 7 to 10 percent above expected.

King County isn't the only place testing pre-paid postage - there are other places that want to increase access, too. This past November, voters in Santa Cruz County, California didn't have to put a stamp on their ballot. Five of the nine Bay Area counties in California provide postage for ballots. Certain counties in Florida, Utah, and New Jersey also pay for postage when voting by mail.

We believe Oregon should join those other states and permit counties to provide pre-paid postage to voters.