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March 18, 2020

Co-Chairs Roblan, Holvey, and members of the committee:

In 2019, the legislature made an important investment in our elections by providing paid postage for ballots. This landmark policy turns every single mailbox into a drop box: making it easier for rural Oregonians, Oregonians with disabilities and limited mobility, and Oregonians who rely on ballot assistance to complete their vote. This bipartisan success has support from the current and former Secretary of State, 42 legislative sponsors, the Governor, and a broad coalition of community based organizations.

Paid postage for ballots is now an important public health intervention, as we consider the potential long lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we did not change the postmark by which ballots are accepted. Currently, ballots must be submitted before election day and with enough time to arrive at the elections office by election day.

If closures and social distancing measures continue, we'll have a 7-day gap where Oregonians need to drop off ballots but libraries and other drop sites are closed. This is a public health concern and could require Oregonians to choose between their health and their vote.

UPDATE THE POSTMARK DATE FOR BALLOTS

Along with other measures to safeguard Oregonians, the legislature should update the postmark date for ballots to be election day. Extending this deadline reduces public health risks associated with Oregonians having to return their ballots in person during the window in which it is risky to mail ballots because they may not be received by election day.

Updating the postmark would keep Oregonians at home, protecting older community members and the immunocomposed, reducing geographic barriers, and smartly addressing COVID-19 related closures and distancing measures.

We think the cost would be minimal, and well worth it to continue Oregon's leadership on safe, secure, efficient elections where every single vote matters regardless of age or distance from a ballot box. In some counties, rural voters live two hours from the County Elections Office. Changing the postmark deadline to election day will mitigate risks associated with breaking social distancing and safeguard rural voices in this election. It is critical to consider elections issues in the COVID-19 response. This affects voters of all political parties, who in the primary, deserve the opportunity to elect leaders whose leadership they can trust in challenging times like today. It is now more important than ever that elected government earns the trust of the community and is representing the people's needs and interests.

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ADDITIONAL REQUESTS

Along with measures to safeguard our elections, we'd like to echo support of requests from Latinos Unidos Siempre, PCUN, Causa, Mano a Mano, Evolve, Safe Routes Partnership, Beyond Toxics, Farmworkers Housing Development Corporation, Capaces, DSA Salem, Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equity, and MRG Foundation. We would like to see the following supports for low income communities:

- Pass statewide rent and mortgage forgiveness for at least two months, and extend as needed
- Pass a statewide suspension on home and apartment utilities, including water, electricity, trash
- Provide statewide multilingual preventative information on COVID-19
- Provide funding for statewide public transit services for three months
- Provide healthcare for all regardless of immigration status
- Provide COVID-19 testing response for all communities regardless of immigration status
- Provide free food and essential resources available to low-income families
- Provide universal childcare for those who continue working
- Support the release of all youth in juvenile detention centers
- Fund emergency shelters for youth impacted by homelessness
- Release of all non-violent convicted individuals in jails and prisons to reduce risk of spread
- Release of all people being held in immigration detention centers