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Dear Chair Smith Warner, Vice Chairs Drazan, Holvey, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Samantha Gladu, and I am the Executive Director of Next Up Action Fund, formerly known as the Bus Project. Our mission is to amplify the voice and leadership of diverse young people to achieve a more just and equitable Oregon. We have a track record of dismantling structural barriers for a more representative democracy, and have driven advocacy efforts for election reforms resulting in Oregon being the #1 easiest state to vote in with 90.2% of eligible voters registered.

In 2015, after half a decade of advocacy, we passed the nation's first ever Automatic Voter registration law. In 2016, Oregon pioneered Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) at DMV offices, automatically forwarding eligible citizen information from the DMV to election officials for voter registration purposes. Oregon's AVR system has been a qualified success, registering more than half a million new registrants and updating registration records for another million. One media outlet covered Oregon's success with the headline "How Oregon increased voter turnout more than any other state."

Accordingly, Other states have looked to Oregon to model pro-voter policy that saves money and time at state agencies, and some are taking further steps to give voters even more options and meet them where they are. Oregon now needs to follow the lead of states like Massachusetts, Washington, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Alaska and Colorado, who have identified agencies like Medicaid, Permanent Fund Division (Alaska), state tax filings, and higher education as potential agencies to reach more eligible voters.

We have worked to identify key areas of improvement to AVR including agency options, a path toward expanding AVR to additional agencies in the future, and critically needed updates to our online voter registration. I'm excited to share context and preview a legislative concept that is in development to reach these aims in the 2021 session, and gratefully acknowledge Representatives Fahey and Zika who have collaborated with us on this, as well as APANO, Causa, and Oregon Student Association.

What is AVR?

AVR builds on the opt-in voter registration system at state agencies required by the federal National Voter Registration Act (NVRA). However, AVR converts this opt-in system to an opt-out model. When an eligible citizen interacts with an AVR agency, she is automatically registered to vote or has her registration updated, unless she declines. AVR uses existing agency interactions where people provide the information needed for

registration (name, address, date of birth, citizenship status) to create more accurate voter rolls and greater access.

AVR Models:

AVR comes in two forms: back-end and front-end. In a back-end system (like the one used at Oregon DMVs), an eligible citizen's information is automatically passed to election officials following an agency transaction. The person is then mailed a postcard (the "back-end" of the transaction), providing the chance to decline registration or affiliate with a political party. Back-end systems work best when the agency already verifies all of the information necessary for registration, including citizenship.

Alternatively, in a front-end system, eligible individuals have their information forwarded to election officials unless the individual declines during the agency transaction (the "front-end" of the transaction). Front-end systems are necessary when an agency does not verify all the information needed for registration or updating, and the person must attest to specific eligibility requirements, such as citizenship.

As noted, AVR is used to create new registrations and update existing registrations. Because updating a registration does not require re-verifying the registrant's citizenship, less information is needed for an update than a new registration. Notably, an agency may be able to use a back-end model for updates, even if it must use a front-end system for new registrations.

Agency Options:

After significant research over the past two years, we and partners have concluded that Oregon can further improve AVR by expanding it to the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and the Oregon Department of Revenue (DOR). These two agencies are ideal candidates for AVR expansion. They reach millions of individuals, including many people who do not interact with the DMV. Further, these agencies interact with customers on an annual basis, more frequently than the DMV. Together, OHA, DOR, and the DMV will reach almost all potential voters in Oregon and bring the state closer to registration rolls that are as current and complete as possible.

Oregon Health Authority

The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) administers the state's Medicaid program, the Oregon Health Plan, which provides health care coverage to low-income residents, covering nearly 1 million Oregonians.

Medicaid offers several advantages for AVR.

- First, the program reaches a large population, including low-income individuals less likely to interact with the DMV.
- Second, Medicaid applications verify all the information needed for voter registration, including citizenship status, allowing for a back-end AVR system.
- Third, Medicaid requires yearly re-enrollment, meaning updates for existing registrants can be made annually, more frequently than DMV AVR.
- Finally, Medicaid offices are already required to offer opt-in voter registration under the NVRA, so an AVR system can build on an existing voter registration system.

Because of these advantages, other states have recognized that Medicaid agencies provide an ideal complement to DMV AVR. Washington and Massachusetts have implemented Medicaid AVR systems, and Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, and Rhode Island have authorized AVR at Medicaid offices.

Oregon Department of Revenue

Oregon can also incorporate AVR into state income tax forms filed with the Oregon Department of Revenue. In 2017, nearly 2.1 million income tax returns were filed in Oregon. AVR would allow each of these filers and their spouses to register to vote or update an existing registration. Revenue officials can pass registration information to election officials electronically and at limited cost for the vast majority of taxpayers who e-file returns. Tax registration is a particularly promising avenue for address updates. Since tax filings occur annually, they can update registration records more frequently than DMV transactions.

Additional Agencies in the Future

OHA, DOR, and the DMV provide the ideal core of an AVR system. Together, these agencies reach almost all eligible voters, and would bring unregistered voters onto the rolls while ensuring current, accurate information for existing registrants. However, even under such a broad system, additional AVR agencies may be needed to reach particular demographic pockets. Accordingly, the Governor should have statutory authority to designate additional state agencies for AVR.

For example, a targeted focus might be necessary to reach the full population of particular groups like college students, Native Americans, or veterans. As such needs emerge, without requiring new legislation, the Governor could implement AVR at agencies that serve these particular groups, such as Oregon's public universities and colleges, tribal offices, and the State Department of Veterans' Affairs. Because of their narrower focus, these agencies are not ideal candidates for immediate expansion of AVR. However, additional study and experience may reveal a need for AVR at these or similar agencies that serve discrete groups rather than the broader public.

Other states, such as Washington, have adopted a similar model, implementing AVR at several named agencies while also granting the Governor the power to expand AVR to additional agencies. Under this proposal, and per our read of a legislative concept in the works, the Governor would not have the authority to rescind AVR, only to expand.

Online Voter Registration Improvements

To complement AVR expansion, Oregon should also update its online voter registration (OVR) system. OVR in Oregon is currently open only to individuals with an Oregon driver's license or ID number, which allows a person's signature image to be pulled from DMV records. People without a DMV-issued ID must still print, sign, and mail a registration form. We know this is a major barrier to completing voter registration and results in Oregonians not registering, updating their registration, or casting their vote.

Oregon should follow the model of other states, which allow individuals without a DMV-issued ID to supply the last four digits of their social security number. These states then pull a signature from other agency records or allow upload of a signature image from a mobile phone picture or tablet capture. This change significantly broadens OVR access for individuals without licenses.

Similarly, Oregon's OVR system should add an application programming interface (API). An API allows certified third-party groups to securely transmit registration forms through Oregon's OVR system. This change modernizes third-party registration drives, as groups can electronically register individuals through the API rather than submitting costly and error-prone paper forms. The process is more cost-efficient and secure for both election officials and third-party groups, and helps bring more individuals onto the rolls with accurate information, complementing the state's AVR system.

Sincerely,

Samantha Gladu
Executive Director, Next Up Action Fund