



Democratic Party of Oregon
Testimony on HB 2491
February 27, 2019

The Democratic Party of Oregon is pleased to submit testimony in support of House Bill 2491-2.

The Party first of all wants to thank the Association of County Clerks for bringing together a work group that included both the Oregon Republican Party and the Democratic Party of Oregon -- the two political parties that provide for Oregonians to participate in the governance of their parties through the election of Precinct Committee Persons (PCPs). We were pleased to have the opportunity to try to solve problems that local elections officials experience with managing PCP elections and believe we have achieved agreement on some significant improvements.

We first want to reinforce the importance of these elections and the public interest in continuing to have PCP elections that are publicly-run.

- Major parties are the means by which Oregonians are given the opportunity to participate in the identification of candidates for statewide office and for national elections, including the Presidency. The State of Oregon has an interest in assuring that Oregonians are able to participate in this process to the fullest possible extent.
- PCP elections are a critical way that our parties assure that Oregonians who wish to have their voice heard get a real chance to do so. Anyone registered as a Democrat or Republican in our state can play a role in governance of their party by becoming a PCP. Having non-party run elections assures that the Party processes are as inclusive and open as possible.

The changes proposed in HB 2491-2 are designed to improve efficiency for the local elections officials while maintaining the greatest accessibility to the ballot for candidates for PCP and preserving the right of voters to write in candidates where they so choose.

- a. The biggest challenge for Clerks has been management, in a timely fashion, of the numerous write-in candidacies that appear on ballots for precinct committeepersons. It appears that a blank line is just a magnet for voters and some folks simply cannot control their need to write in everyone from Mickey Mouse and Tinkerbell and the ubiquitous John or Mary Smith. Clerks struggle to know who was intended to get the vote and whether the names represented real people qualified for the PCP positions and willing to serve.



The workgroup discussed the problem at length and agreed that two things could improve the process: one is to allow for PCP candidates who have not filed through the regular process to file an intention to run a write-in campaign after the filing deadline. The other would be to allow others to “nominate” someone qualified and real as a write-in candidate, again, after the filing deadline. Both filings would be required to be submitted before 8 PM on election night.

These processes would allow Clerks to narrow the field of write-in ballots that require counting while not eliminating the possibility of a write-in campaign by a candidate or by their neighbors and friends.

- b. Other sections of the bill contain provisions expanding the opportunities for PCPs to be either appointed or elected when their current residence is in a precinct that already has their full complement of PCPs. It was agreed that allowing a candidate for a PCP slot where the slots are already filled to be placed instead as a PCP either for an adjoining precinct or any other precinct within the same House District would be appropriate. Although in some cases PCP slots go unfilled, there are indeed many places where there are more than enough applicants for the precinct to be covered.
- c. And finally, another section of the bill removes the provisions that requires persons running for PCP to identify as either male or female when they file or are elected. These requirements were well-intentioned elements that were built in to our statutes in an effort to increase the number of women in party leadership. However, as a state we now recognize that identifying only two genders restricts the opportunity for some Oregonians to participate and requiring “assignment” as either male or female should not be part of our state systems. It was agreed in our workgroup that this could be subject to legal challenge and that we should no longer require gender identification for PCP candidates. Speaking for the Democratic party, we will seek other ways to assure that women are treated equally in our party rules and have the opportunity to lead.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to have negotiated these items with the local elections officers and the Oregon Republican Party and we encourage the committee to move forward and put them into law.