

House Committee on Agriculture and Land Use
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900 Court Street NE
Salem Oregon 97301

March 10, 2019

Re: Public Testimony for HB 2958

Dear Chair Clem and Members of the House Agriculture and Land Use Committee,

I am writing to ask that you defer House Bill 2958 and direct the Soil & Water Conservation Commission (SWCC) to convene an inclusive work group to deliberately study and make recommendations for improvement of the current Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) director elections eligibility criteria. I believe that HB 2958, as currently written, does not fully encompass the various options for improving access to participation across the 45 SWCDs in our state. I believe that there exists a genuine opportunity for making significant and meaningful improvements to the director elections eligibility criteria, and that this should be done in a deliberate and inclusive way.

I have been an elected director of the West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District (WMSWCD) for over a dozen years. I represent Zone 5 and currently serve as the Board Chair. In my leadership role, I have been an involved member of our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee since its inception several years ago. We have dedicated many hours to addressing the current and future decline in adequate district board representation as current board members begin to retire, and in recognition of the stark lack of racial diversity on SWCD boards across the state. We believe that finding ways to be more inclusive at the board level means greater diversity in representation for taxpayers, voters, and recipients of SWCD services.

We are one of the only SWCDs in the state to directly study and attempt to find solutions for the lack of racial diversity of our board and staff, and to find ways to ensure that all of our constituents have appropriate access to relevant and inclusive services. One of the major barriers to such diversity that we have identified is the current set of director elections eligibility criteria, which unnecessarily prevents most of our residents from being able to run for office as a Zone Director.

There exist opportunities for compromise between the current eligibility requirements and the proposed HB 2958. Two examples of compromises that could improve access to Zone Director positions include the reduction or removal of land ownership requirements within the existing geographic zone format, and the addition of more At-Large positions. Again, I ask that the Committee defer HB 2958, and direct the SWCC to assemble a multi-partner and multi-interest work group to develop a comprehensive list of appropriate options for improving director elections eligibility criteria.

Sincerely,



Terri Preeg Riggsby,
Chair and Zone 5 Director
West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District

cc: Oregon Association of Conservation Districts; Oregon Soil & Water Conservation Commission