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I would like to submit the following testimony regarding Senate Bill 226. I plan to join Kyle Markley today to present in person. I am also a board member of the libertarian party of Oregon

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Testimony in support of Oregon SB 226
Prepared by Katy Brumbelow for 4/3/19 Hearing before Senate Rules Committee

Unless we believe that political parties and competition between them are a thing of the past, SB226 makes a lot of sense. Particularly when it comes to primaries in Oregon, we have a very obvious dichotomy - those who are registered to vote and those who participate. I believe former SOS Dennis Richardson recognized this strange discrepancy and crafted SB226 to amend a problem within the rules that have created it, at the same time providing a way forward. While I believe that some modification is necessary to allow minor political parties, including our own, to operate under their own bylaws, overall it is a worthy bill that deserves your consideration and eventual support and implementation.

In our last election, a non-presidential year, 33% of registered voters participated in the primary election. Here are five possible reasons:

1. Less people vote in non-presidential election years
2. The percentage of those who do not choose a political party continues to increase
3. People are less likely to participate if they feel no sense of urgency - they are already being represented.
4. Voter apathy on the part of those who do not feel their elected officials represent them

We all know these, but the kicker is number five:

5. Voters who do not belong to one of the major parties have a significantly smaller pool of options to choose from to represent them due to the language under current election law.

As an official elected by the people of Oregon to oversee fair elections, number five was clearly concerning to a conscientious Secretary of State. The other four are outside his area and hinge greatly on the activity and reputation of the various parties. Hence SB226.

While not perfect, I believe SB226 to be in the best interests of voters in my state - not just Libertarian voters, but all voters. Political parties are the original lobbyists whose longstanding concerns have coalesced into platforms and principle statements. Competition between them is healthy, encouraging dialogue and improved solutions that are closer to the people whom officials are elected to serve. Without this competition, good ideas remain unheard, and poor ideas can sail through without constructive comment.

Senate Bill 226 invites minor parties into the political process, replacing outdated language that effectively recognizes only two parties. It gives them a framework which allows them to have a voice at all levels of government. In so doing, it provides major political parties an incentive to have improved communication with their own voters in order to more accurately and vigilantly represent their concerns.

It challenges minor parties, like mine, to step up and streamline their voting system and improve their communication with voters. It allows current statewide resources to move closer to representing all voters, rather than only Republicans and Democrats, and to a precarious extent, Independents. It encourages all parties to improve their connection with newly registered and non-affiliated voters in order to stay abreast of their concerns and thus have a chance to draw their allegiance.

If passed, it will increase competition for the non-affiliated vote. These are the people who are most disenfranchised and their number is growing. Based upon February's data from the Secretary of State's office, these account for 32% of the electorate. These people do not generally have an interest in voting in primaries since they have no opportunity to elect an official due to the closed primary process.

The Independent, Working Families, Pacific Green, Libertarian, Constitution and Progressive Parties did not form on a whim, but as a response to long-standing concerns with government priorities in our state. Collectively they represent only 1.6% of the people, with a group called "other" not included and accounting for the other 0.4%. However their concerns speak to an undisclosed number that cannot be counted because they have not been heard from in this state for years. I congratulate the Independent Party for reaching major party status, but even they are at a disadvantage with numbers currently at 4.5%, hovering below the 5% necessary to maintain major party status.

The increase in non-affiliation speaks out to each political party of a need to listen to and inform voters, drawing them into the process. Passage of SB226 with some adjustments, will allow this by enfranchising more players in this process. Then the state of Oregon can continue to address the needs of its citizens more effectively, rather than becoming complacent within the walls of a less and less responsive echo-chamber. Nobody wants that. I know. I talked to a lot of people last year, hearing their concerns and frustrations, in a successful, low-budget attempt to be placed on the ballot for the general election for ORHD 27. My party had to run its own primary, without assistance from the Secretary of State. Resources are already quite limited within the libertarian party, and yet we too pay taxes and believe in fair elections.