

TESTIMONY FOR HB 2492

April 17, 2019

Dear Chair Holvey and Members of the Rules Committee,

My name is Olivia Orosco and I am a recent graduate of Willamette University. I appreciate the space to give testimony to you today. I was first introduced to the idea of this bill over a year ago now and it is an honor to have seen it through to today as it sits before your committee.

I began working on equity in the upcoming census through a research grant last summer with Professor Janet Lorenzen and the idea of addressing Oregon's prison gerrymandering practice flowed naturally out of that work. I quickly came to learn that what has now evolved into HB 2492, was not the first attempt Oregon has made to enact our constitutional ideals of "one person, one vote". Through meeting with legislators and talking with people from organizations who had worked on this in the past, such as Common Cause Oregon, the ACLU, Unite Oregon, and others, not least of which the Prison Policy Initiative, which tracks prison gerrymandering across the US, I learned that Oregon, in fact, has a long legislative history of bipartisan attempts to address the mis-counting of people who are incarcerated.

Unfortunately, these past efforts, which began just shy of the cutoff for the 2010 census, have never made it out of committee and onto the floor to see a vote. I hope that this year is different. It needs to be. This legislation-- these efforts to bring our census counting practices in line with our state constitution, with our founding principles of democracy, have had ten years to mature. We have gained examples as other states, such as Maryland, California, Delaware and New York have addressed prison gerrymandering in their own legislative bodies, and five states are currently floating bills attempting to do the same. We have seen lawsuits been brought forth on the basis of the undemocratic districts this practice leads to, such as in Connecticut, and we have seen the 2011 redistricting process happen in Oregon, a process that we have the opportunity to improve upon with this bill.

The redistricting process is irrefutably one fraught with political turmoil, but what is important about this bill is that it makes no attempt to engage in the physical drawing of boundaries, but instead will make available the best possible data with which to do the arduous task of creating districts and wards. This best possible data will help to make sure our state is truly giving "one person, one vote." It will address the disenfranchisement of oregon communities of color, who are far over-represented in Oregon's incarcerated population, where votes are being pulled from. House Bill 2492 will work to make sure all Oregonians voices matter, because that is how democracy works.

I am invigorated to be here today in support of House Bill 2492, with the amendments that are currently being worked on. I urge you to pass this legislation now, before we must wait another ten years to have our redistricting data represent our states reality.

Thank you,



Olivia Orosco