Senate and House Committees on Redistricting
February 25, 2021

Chairs Taylor and Salinas, Vice Chairs Knopp and Boshart Davis, and members of the joint committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am Dave Dillon, executive vice president of Oregon Farm Bureau, whose membership includes nearly 7,000 farm and ranch families who live and work across all 36 Oregon counties.

We have seen in recent months that democratic institutions and those structures which support them should never be taken for granted. They must be maintained with the utmost care and attention. As the bedrock upon which our elections and representative form of government rest, redistricting deserves the highest level of attention and care possible.

To that end, we believe the following principles are essential elements of the 2021 redistricting process:

The process must be non-partisan and incumbent blind so that it serves the needs of the voters over the desires of candidates and incumbents.

The process must maintain respect for communities of common interest and not split them unnecessarily.

The inputs, criteria used, analysis, and rationale for decision-making must be fully transparent during and after the process.

The process must include and incorporates public input throughout.

As a farm and ranch family organization, Oregon Farm Bureau naturally has concern about the treatment of rural Oregonians in the redistricting process. 25 of Oregon's 36 counties are categorized as "non-metro" rural, meaning they have no communities of 40,000 or more

residents. Ten of those counties have population density of less than six people per square mile. Even Oregon's most populous counties have many rural and agriculture-dependent residents. The lower population of these communities makes them more vulnerable to gerrymandering, where districts are drawn to dilute the voice of these rural citizens. It is essential to protect rural communities of interest in the redistricting process. With fewer than 25% of Oregonians being considered "rural," there is little chance of over-representation in any redistricting scenario we can imagine. The danger of under-representation however is quite real. We believe this is true of other communities of common interest in Oregon.

Oregon Farm Bureau supported Initiative Petition 57, which would have amended the state constitution and created an independent redistricting process for Oregon. While COVID-19 restrictions caused that campaign to fall short of the full number of signatures required to appear on last November's ballot, we still believe the approach to redistricting in IP57 is the best way to ensure the redistricting process is carried out in a fair manner. We encourage legislators to put forward IP57's process or one substantially similar as a referred constitutional amendment for voter consideration in Nov. 2022.

I served on the IP57 steering committee along with Oregonians from across the political spectrum. The committee included the League of Women Voters of Oregon, Common Cause, NAACP of Lane County, and several more groups whose common purpose was and is to fight for a redistricting process that is in its substance open, fair, and independent of political influence. In these times when the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that elected officials may legally gerrymander districts, it is more important than ever that any credible redistricting process must be open, fair, and independent, and must be *seen* as open, fair, and independent. The need to deliver fair process and results where no Oregonian feels disenfranchised by lines drawn on a map may never have been greater.

We thank you for the work of this committee and for the legislature's efforts to explore the legality of various way forward given the constitutional deadlines the belated census data will force us to miss. Without the full census data and the time to run a credible process for redistricting, Oregon could be saddled for a decade of second-guessing and further division. Thank you for the opportunity to present these comments.