

April 10, 2021

Co-Chairs Taylor, and Salinas, Vice-Chairs, Knopp, and Boshart-Davis, and members of the redistricting committees,

For the record, my name is Paul Krissel, my pronouns are he/him and I live in Marion County, Senate District 11, House District 21. We have lived in Salem for over 25 years and both of my daughters graduated from Salem Keizer Public Schools. I remember in 1996 when we first moved here from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, we were walking around downtown Salem and my youngest daughter, then 8, asked me if there were no Black people in Oregon. She was used to seeing a more diverse community and expressed the surprise of an innocent that Salem was so white. In all those years in Salem, save for State Treasurer Jim Hill, I don't recall ever being represented in my jurisdiction by a person of color at the State, County, City or School District level. When my daughters were going to school, the student body was becoming increasingly diverse. Yet that diversity of our community is not reflected in our elected representatives in this area. Among the many barriers standing in the way of diverse leadership is the way our political boundaries divide communities of color in ways that decrease their voice in elections.

I am a founding member of the Racial Justice Organizing Committee. We are a 6 year old committee of allies working with organizations representing Black, Indigenous and People of Color in the Salem area to fight against systems of racism and oppression that operate in our community. I am a firm believer that our elected officials at every level need to reflect the racial diversity of the community. Though some progress is being made in some Oregon jurisdictions, (and we are part of a coalition seeking to change the makeup of the Salem Keizer School Board this May) it is still distressingly true that People of Color have little voice at any level of governance and policy making in this state.

The redistricting process must work to eliminate this one barrier to diverse representation by closely looking at communities of interest and how BIPOC communities are represented within those districts.

We also hope that the committee plans to have more engagement and education with communities. And that this plan is shared out in advance so that our communities have time to learn about this complicated process.

I look forward to working with this committee, the Oregon legislature and our communities to ensure that redistricting engages communities of Color and that it responds to our growing needs.

Thank you very much for your time and work on this issue, and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

Paul Krissel
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