
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon

March 4, 2021

Chair Smith Warner, Vice-Chairs Drazan and Holvey, and Members of the House Committee on Rules,

Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon has made access to democracy a top priority. Reproductive freedom and health care are often attacked at the ballot box and unfairly politicized, so we advocate for policies that ensure everyone can vote to defend their bodily autonomy and access to health care. We respectfully request the committee's support of HB 2745, the Voter Access Act, and a related language-access bill HB 3021.

Civic participation is the bedrock of any democracy. To facilitate full and robust voter engagement in our elections, we need to decrease barriers and expand access to safe and secure voting. From automatic voter registration to paid postage for ballots, Oregon has long been a vanguard and national leader in improving access to the ballot. Yet, more than 200,000 Oregonians in our state who are considered to have Limited English Proficiency (LEP) are often overlooked in or excluded from the political process due to language barriers. This leaves many women of color, Indigenous communities, transgender and gender nonconforming people of color wondering if their vote even matters.¹

Census data shows that dozens of languages are spoken throughout regions of the state, yet not enough resourcing is given to reach voters in the languages they speak in a meaningful way. It is no wonder then that language barriers are one issue we regularly encounter when reaching out to voters of color. Providing information about voting only in English disenfranchises thousands of Oregon voters.

Political or candidate campaigns have historically neglected or outright ignored these households in their outreach and communications strategies. As an organization that does voter registration and get-out-the-vote work, we know the value of self-identified race, ethnicity, and preferred language data in connecting meaningfully and authentically with these communities. These communities are consistently undercounted in multiple systems, from the census to student population to patient care. This compounded undercounting of communities of color only continues the long traditions of disenfranchisement. When we've engaged with voters of color at the door and on phones we've seen significant impact in voter turnout and participation in the political process.

The Voter Access Act, also known as HB 2745, ensures that voters can *voluntarily* provide their preferred language, in addition to race and ethnicity. We also see a great advantage to a companion concept in HB 3021, which would require the Secretary of State to create and make publicly available a list of five most common languages spoken and ensures the state voters' pamphlet and county voters' pamphlet are translated into each of those five identified languages and made available on the county website. These simple next steps will strengthen our democracy and ensure that as a state that's known for knocking down barriers to voting access, we are living up to the values we set around inclusion for all. Ensuring adequate access to language materials in the languages voters understand is a key element of a fair, effective, and responsive election system in Oregon.

At a time when misinformation about election fraud abounds and the votes of Black, Indigenous and People of Color have been actively suppressed in other states, Oregon can lead by meaningfully expanding access to the

¹ Oregon 2010 Census Data.

vote. HB 2745 and HB 3021 take a step in the right direction by harnessing the power of Oregon's motor voter law to collect data that will allow the Secretary of State and county elections offices across the state to better serve all Oregon voters. Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon respectfully urges the committee's support of HB 2745 and HB 3021.

Sincerely,

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Interim Executive Director
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon