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

For the record, my name is Isabela Villarreal, I use she/her pronouns, and I am the Policy and Communications Manager at Next Up Action Fund, formerly known as the Bus Project. Our mission is to build political power with diverse young people to achieve a more just and equitable Oregon. As an organization that builds political power and strong, effective leadership pipelines for diverse young people, our work and our communities are greatly impacted by HB 2560, which will support equitable access to civic engagement. Because of this, we are in strong support of HB 2560.

The more people that are included in our democracy, the better. HB 2560 gets at the heart of a persistent problem: the accessibility issues of in-person public hearings. By making current, temporary remote access to meetings/hearings permanent after the state's COVID-related restrictions on in-person hearings are lifted, Oregon can greatly increase the number of people who are able to participate in the process of giving input and shaping legislation. Remote access to public hearings is an incredibly important way to have a more equitable process because it would vastly increase who can participate. When the only option is to testify in person, we exclude large swaths of Oregonians from the democratic process - especially those who live far from their county seat, who do not or cannot drive, or who have family or school obligations that prevent them from coming in person, to name a few.

The young people we work with are extremely passionate and dedicated to shaping our state and our collective future. They invest so much energy and time in order to address the most pressing issues of today, and yet, not being able to get to the Legislature in person is a huge barrier that should not, and does not need to exist. We are excited that we have a goal of having every young person in our base testify this legislative session, and that truly would not be a possibility without remote access.

As a leader in the country for our innovation towards accessible and equitable elections, supporting HB 2560 is a vital step to continue expanding who can participate in our democracy.

Thank you,

Isabela Villarreal
Policy and Communications Manager, Next Up Action Fund