

To: Senate Committee On Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110 Implementation
From: Cristina Nieves, Common Cause Oregon
Re: Restoring Voting Rights (SB 571)
Date: March 10, 2021

Common Cause:

Common Cause is a nonpartisan organization that works for open, honest, accountable government. We are over one million Americans – including roughly 30,000 Oregonians – working together to realize the unfinished promise of democracy.

As such, Common Cause supports [SB 571](#).

Oregon has a painful history. And we are working to repair the damage.

We cannot overlook our past when it comes to the treatment of people of color. It shows up in our criminal justice system, with the disproportionate incarceration of historically marginalized folks. When systemic racism results in the removal of voting rights – the foundation to our electoral system and values – our democracy has failed. SB 571 acknowledges the damage that has been caused by racism and marginalization. It is an important and unprecedented step in the right for reparations.

Some recommendations to support our fight for equity in the democratic process:

- Allowing for people that are held in federal facilities in Oregon, but were convicted of crimes outside of Oregon to change their residence to the location of the prison, or an Oregon residential address to allow them the opportunity to vote.
- Allowing the people that are held in federal facilities to choose the prison as their address. This could be helpful in instances where the person incarcerated does not have proper documentation to list their last known address on voter registration forms, or they want the ability to hold elected officials who have jurisdiction of the prison accountable.
- The bill designates the Secretary of State and the Department of Corrections to voting establish procedures, but there is no mention of the federal Bureau of Prisons. It might be beneficial to direct the Secretary of State, to the extent possible, to work with Bureau of Prisons to extend voting rights to people incarcerated at federal facilities.

Oregon has a chance to be a leader.

Although many other states have attempted to reinstate voting rights for those who are incarcerated, Oregon would be the first state to be successful in this endeavor (joining the two states -Maine and Vermont – that never took them away). We have an opportunity to continue as the trailblazers in this effort. SB 571 is one step forward in repairing the damage that has been done to our democracy.

Thank you again for considering this testimony.