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RE: Strongly Support HB 2366

March 9, 2021

Chair Smith Warner, Vice Chairs Drazan and Holvey, and members of the House Committee On Rules,

For the record, my name is Samantha Gladu and I am the Executive Director of 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. We have diligently worked to shape our elections system for nearly two decades, with a highlight reel of victories that includes paid postage for ballots, pre-registration for 16 and 17-year-olds, the nation's first ever automatic voter registration law, online voter registration, and more. Our work has contributed toward Oregon being the #1 easiest state to vote in, with 90.2% of eligible Oregonians registered. We're constantly thinking about how we can improve our election systems and dismantle structural barriers so that those who are left out and left behind by our democracy can have their voices heard. Accordingly, we support HB 2366.

Restoration of voting rights is a concept that we have been working toward for three years. From working with young men at MacLaren to working with a broad, cross-movement coalition of advocates like Oregon Justice Resource Center and APANO, to having this hearing, we have learned that legislative action is necessary to rectify the unequal access to voting which people impacted by our legal system have been afforded by lawmakers of the past.

HB 2366 is a comprehensive solution to overturn restrictions on civil rights that are rooted in racism at a time when all across Oregon people are uniting for racial justice and demanding change. The bill most explicitly impacts Oregonians in prison. It will also have ripple effects toward correcting persistent misinformation about whether or when someone who has been convicted of a felony can vote if they're out of prison, ending prison-based gerrymandering, and clarifying that state and local agencies must address the uneven access to the legal right to vote for Oregonians in county jails and currently eligible Oregonians at youth correctional facilities.

This is a big bill, but it is not scary. Some have asked whether we should reinforce the dynamic already at play, and restore the civil right of voting to some Oregonians but not others based on what they're incarcerated for. To that, we say no, and the answer is rooted in the racist origins of our state which this legislature has for the most part disavowed. We must never forget that our state's founders decided to ban Black people from living here rather than take a stand to affirm or deny slavery. To continue to delineate who we restore rights to based on their sentencing is a failure to recognize the unimpeachable rights that we all have as citizens. This kind of bargaining would be once again denying the humanity, autonomy, and citizenship of incarcerated community members. This is about the mechanics of our democracy, not crime

and punishment or biases that we develop from worst-case scenarios.

An important factor of this bill is that it prevents bubbles of populations of voters from emerging at the site of a correctional facility by registering voters at their Oregon address prior to their incarceration, rather than at the place where they're incarcerated. For those in custody without a past home address, an approximation of a residence and a current mailing address will suffice. As you may know, the mailing address is the most integral component of a voter being able to receive a ballot. Indigent and displaced Oregonians who do not have a residence address may register with any landmark as a residence address and any facility where they may receive mail as a mailing address. This is an existing practice of our best in the nation voting system which can be applied to the implementation of HB 2366.

We brag about our elections system all the time. And yet, when we look at it more critically to inspect the gaps in access, we find that voting rights are stripped from incarcerated Oregonians regardless of their sentence. A right without access is not a right at all, and HB 2366 does what is necessary to truly restore voting rights to those incarcerated in prison, jails, or youth correctional facilities. Our secure and efficient vote by mail system, which includes paid postage, can logically be applied at correctional facilities.

Please send HB 2366 to the floor with a do-pass recommendation, and affirm the humanity and value of all Oregonians once again.

Thank you,

Samantha Gladu
Executive Director, Next Up Action Fund