

Isabela Villarreal
333 SE 2nd Ave.
Portland, OR 97214
RE: Support for HB 2499



April 6th, 2021

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 Communication Manager at Next Up Action Fund, formerly known as the Bus Project. We have a track record of dismantling structural barriers for more representative democracy and have driven advocacy efforts for election reforms resulting in Oregon being the #1 easiest state to vote in with 90.2% of eligible voters registered. I am here to represent our organization in enthusiastic support of HB 2499, which will expand Automatic Voter Registration to multiple agencies and open Online Voter Registration to all eligible voters.

In 2015, after half a decade of advocacy, we helped pass the nation's first-ever Automatic Voter registration law. Oregon's AVR system has been a qualified success, registering more than half a million new registrants and updating registration records for another million. Yet, eligible Oregon voters are still being left out of New Motor Voter. Roughly 10% of Oregonians lack a driver's license, and the rate of getting a driver's license is trending down nationally. This decline is particularly among young and low-income populations, while many seniors lose access to drivers licenses as their vision declines. Age and income should not disqualify an eligible voter from participating in elections.

After significant research over the past two years, we and partners have concluded that Oregon can further improve AVR by expanding voter access to two additional agencies- Medicaid and the Department of Revenue, and will also give the governor the power to assign other agencies to implement AVR in addition to the ones listed. Together, OHA, DOR, and the DMV will reach almost all potential voters in Oregon and bring the state closer to registration rolls that are as current and complete as possible.

- **The first, Oregon Health Authority** which administers the state's Medicaid program, the Oregon Health Plan, which includes low-income individuals less likely to interact with the DMV, and Medicaid applications verify all the information needed for voter registration, including citizenship status. Its yearly re-enrollment means that data will be more up-to-date than the DMV. Additionally, Medicaid offices are already required to offer opt-in voter registration under the National Voter Registration Act, so an AVR system can build on and streamline an existing voter registration system.
- **The second, Oregon Department of Revenue.** While tax filing does not require citizenship verification as a part of the process, millions of Oregonians file state income tax forms each year; In 2017, nearly 2.1 million income tax returns were filed in Oregon. This system will allow Oregonians who already are registered to vote and have demonstrated eligibility to easily have their address updated as a part of the filing process without requiring additional action. Because many filers still receive a check by mail, these

addresses are highly likely to be accurate and up-to-date.

In order to complement AVR expansion, HB 2499 updates our online voter registration (OVR) system. OVR in Oregon is currently open only to individuals with an Oregon driver's license or ID number, which allows a person's signature image to be pulled from DMV records. People without a DMV-issued ID must still print, sign, and mail a registration form. We know this is a major barrier to completing voter registration and results in Oregonians not registering, updating their registration, or casting their vote. Oregon should follow the model of other states, which allow individuals without a DMV-issued ID to supply the last four digits of their social security number and also provide a signature. This change significantly broadens OVR access for individuals without licenses.

At Next Up Action Fund, we strongly believe that the backbone of a strong democracy is the ability of everyone to participate in it. All of these updates ensure that as Oregon's economy and demographic makeup shifts, automatic voter registration is offered at the most impactful agencies and online voter registration is accessible to all. I strongly urge you to vote in support of HB 2499 to build the strongest, most inclusive democracy we can.

Thank you,

Isabela Villarreal
Policy and Communications Manager