KHANH PHAM
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 46

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Testimony in support of SB 571

February 24, 2021

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and members of the committee,

My name is Khanh Pham, and I am the State Representative for House District 46. I'm proud to testify today in support of Senate Bill 571. As the first Vietnamese-American legislator in Oregon, I ran because I believe that our government is stronger when it represents the diverse voices of the communities we serve. As a community organizer, I remember holding ballot parties with our Asian and Pacific Islander members, taking them to Salem, and introducing them to our political process. Most of them had never been to the capitol or ever talked to a legislator before. And I saw them light up and get excited as they started to make the connections between the voter pamphlet statement they received in the mail, and the legislators they were meeting with, people who were making decisions that directly impacted their lives.

Voting is a fundamental right that recognizes that each individual deserves a voice in their community, and in their government. As legislators, it is our role to enfranchise Oregonians, to expand opportunities for residents to shape their communities, to lower barriers for participation in self-government, and to proactively take steps to show the people of Oregon that we welcome and encourage the vote for those who want to vote.

As political representatives, we are beholden to improve the lives of our fellow Oregonians. ***Oregonians do not cease being Oregonians when the state incarcerates them***. They should retain their civic status throughout their sentences. It is through votes that Oregonians can continue to hold us, their representatives, accountable.

About 15 years ago, I had the privilege of being part of a volunteer group in Oakland called the Asian Prisoner Support Committee. We would visit prisons, and were matched with pen pals in prison. Getting to know these prisoners was enlightening and broke every stereotype I had about who is in prison. These men were thoughtful, and trying to take accountability for their actions. They started clubs and were determined to learn and teach each other so they could leave and be active members of society later.

The ability to vote while incarcerated, reminds people that they are still meaningful members of society, and encourages them towards civic participation. Incarcerated folks are directly impacted by elections. From their meals to their medical care to the school districts which their children attend, the laws we create and amend will continue to govern our constituents regardless of their status and location. Oregon should respect the voices of all Oregonians, including those who are incarcerated.

I urge the members of this committee to support SB 571. It aligns with Oregon values and grants a voice to those who are among the most disenfranchised members of our community. Thank you.