

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110 Implementation

My name is Joshua Spector and I am an organizer with Sunrise PDX. I am writing to testify in support of Senate Bill 571, but first want to express my appreciation and strong support for the words shared earlier by Senator Merkley, Senator Manning, Senator Frederick and Senator Wagner regarding SJM2 and SJR10.

In regards to Bill 571, I believe it is a crucial step in dismantling barriers to reintegration, and dismantling inequitable power structures that exist within these institutions.

95% of people who are in prison right now will return to their communities. Reentry is already a difficult endeavor because of systems in place meant to marginalize formerly imprisoned individuals. However, having strong ties to community allows people to reintegrate into society with a sense of agency and purpose. Civic engagement is one way to do this - it reduces recidivism and creates people power within communities.

Right now, the lives of people in prison are dictated by policies made by elected officials. Unless these individuals are given the right to vote and participate in the democratic process, they are not able to hold officials accountable, and this perpetuates inequitable power dynamics.

With 75% of women in Oregon prisons being mothers, and 100% of people in prison having families or friends who care about them and their future, this bill and what it could mean is deeply personal for folks. It's a step towards liberation for people who have been unjustly treated by the systems at play.

To be clear, this type of legislation is just one step in addressing the destructive legacy the prison system uplifts. but for now and for the purpose of altering the systemic practices of disenfranchisement in play, the restoration of voting rights for those in prison is a place to start.

I do believe the abolition of the prison system is critical in this conversation, for many of the reasons put forward this morning regarding the destructive legacy this system uplifts. but for now and for the purpose of altering the systemic practices of disenfranchisement in play, the restoration of voting rights for those in prison is a place to start.