

My name is Mark Cebert and I am a second year law student at Lewis and Clark Law School in Portland, OR. I write today in unequivocal support of SB 571. The disenfranchisement of incarcerated people offends the basic notions of equity and civic involvement that our nation and state were purportedly founded upon. Although SB 571 likely has a plethora of benefits, it specifically will help remedy the systemic racism present in the criminal justice system and reduce the likelihood that incarcerated folk will struggle with reintegration into society. I address each of these benefits in turn:

Racial Equality:

Oregon's criminal justice system disproportionately incarcerates people of color, particularly Black and Indigenous people. Despite representing only 2% of the total population, Black people represent 10% of the incarcerated population. Although representing only 1% of the total population, Indigenous people represent 3% of the total incarcerated population. Latinx people are similarly overrepresented, comprising 12% of the state's population but 16% of the incarcerated population.(Prison Policy Initiative). These statistics are important, as minority groups are overpoliced, over-prosecuted, and more likely to receive longer/harsher sentences. What this amounts to is a disenfranchisement of people of color, who lose their right to vote due to a system that targets people of color, particularly for non-violent crimes. Oregon has already moved to pass legislation ending the racial disparities in the justice system. Passing SB 571 will address the consequences of this system. A brief look at history emphasizes the need for this legislation. In the past, literacy tests and poll taxes were crafted to bar people of color from exercising the right to vote. Modernly, mandatory minimum sentences, disparate sentences, and over policing of communities of color bars people of color from voting and implementing social change. Whether intentionally or not, the overincarceration of Black and Brown people has extended this system, and SB 571 is an important step in ensuring that the promise of the 15th Amendment

Reintegration:

Supposedly, one of the goals of the criminal justice system is to rehabilitate people who commit legal infractions. Oregon has been on the forefront of making rehabilitation a focus of incarceration, and recent developments, including measure 110 emphasize Oregonian's wish that less people are imprisoned and more people are integrated as contributing members of our society. Voting rights for incarcerated people is a crucial component of achieving this goal. Denying these rights denies the opportunity to allow incarcerated people to follow and engage in issues that will impact them upon release. Under SB 571, incarcerated people will be incentivized to deepen their education on a number of important societal issues. Restoring the voting rights of incarcerated people gives them a stake in our society. Voting members of society who are actively engaged in the civic discussion of their fellow citizens are more easily integrated upon release, as they contemplate the current issues, innovations, and solutions facing the state.

I urge you to support SB 571 and to empower people of color and incarcerated populations through suffrage.