



March 9, 2021

Chair Smith Warner, Vice-Chairs Drazan and Holvey, and Members of the Committee,

NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon considers access to a healthy democracy as one of our most important priorities. Our organization is dedicated to building and sustaining a movement that uses the political process to guarantee every individual the right to make personal decisions regarding the full range of reproductive choices, including preventing unintended pregnancy, raising healthy families, and choosing legal abortion.

We strongly believe that a person's bodily autonomy should not be up for debate on the ballot, yet we must contend with an anti-choice opposition that while small in numbers, is incredibly well-resourced. Every few years it falls on organizations like NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon and our partners to mobilize thousands of voters, to raise millions in campaign dollars, and do everything within our power to defend reproductive freedom on the ballot box. In 2018, NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon was part of a transformative coalition with ACLU - Oregon, APANO, Forward Together, Oregon Nurses Association, Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon, SEIU, and Western States Center to defeat Measure 106, a ban on public funding of abortion care in Oregon. Our partners were intentional in our efforts to engage communities that would have been most impacted by this ban; and as a direct result, we defeated an abortion ban by the highest vote count in the 2018 election; **we also won by the largest margin in our state's ballot measure history.**

I wish for a future when access to abortion and other essential reproductive services is not unfairly politicized. However, in order to ensure that Oregon remains the only state with no legal restrictions on abortion access, it is important to enact policies to remove barriers that may prevent anyone from voting (including the 7-in-10 who support *Roe v. Wade*).

**That is what is on the line today: the ability of our fellow Oregonians to have a voice, to be able to vote when their own bodily autonomy and access to health care is up for political debate. We respectfully request the committee's support of House Bill 2366.**

From automatic voter registration to paid postage for ballots, Oregon has been a vanguard and leader in improving access to the ballot, yet, we are also a state founded on laws explicitly excluding Black people from settling within our borders. By restoring voting rights to incarcerated Oregonians, House Bill 2366 will take a historic step toward eliminating laws rooted in white supremacy that have no correlation to public safety.

Almost everyone in prison will one day return to their communities. Re-entry can be a difficult process, but having strong ties to the community increases the chances of success. Civic engagement, specifically voting, increases the ability for reintegration, reducing recidivism and making communities safer.

The lives of people in prison and the lives of their families on the outside are greatly influenced by policies made by elected officials. About 75% of those in the Coffee Creek correctional facility are mothers.<sup>1</sup> The number of women and people who identify as gender non-priority imprisoned in the Oregon Department of

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<sup>1</sup> [www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/crime/2017/02/16/oregon-faces-skyrocketing-female-prison-population/98012786/](http://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/crime/2017/02/16/oregon-faces-skyrocketing-female-prison-population/98012786/)



Corrections has nearly tripled over the past 20 years, and yet we also know that this population is not committing more frequent or serious crimes.<sup>2</sup> The increased rates of incarceration are due to changes in sentencing laws, often related to certain drug and property crimes, disproportionately impacting women of color.<sup>3</sup>

Justice-involved women and gender non-binary individuals have experienced childhood victimization, family violence, unhealthy relationships, unsafe housing, and often are of lower socioeconomic statuses.<sup>4</sup> Depriving these individuals of a voice in the electoral process further reinforces these cycles of structural discrimination and marginalization. People in prison should be able to influence the electoral process and hold elected officials accountable for the decisions that directly impact them and their families.

The right to vote is only taken away from Oregonians while they are incarcerated in a state prison. The removal of voting rights should not be connected to punishment. The removal of voting rights is civic death and an affront to civil liberties – particularly for Black, Latinx and young people who are disenfranchised at much higher rates because of disproportionate incarceration, often resulting from racist and otherwise discriminatory public policies.

**Civic participation is the bedrock of any democracy.** At a time when misinformation about election fraud abounds and the votes of Black, Indigenous and people of color have been actively suppressed in other states, Oregon can lead by expanding access to the vote and restoring voting rights to nearly 15,000 Oregonians in prison. Maine, Vermont and the District of Columbia allow incarcerated people to vote. More than 20 states are considering making this change, and Oregon can build upon our status as a national leader in voting access. **NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon urges your support of HB 2366.**

Sincerely,

Christel Allen  
Executive Director  
NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.