TRIBAL DEMOCRACY PROJECT

Dear Co-chair Senator Lieber, Co-chair Representative Holvey, and members of the committee,

My name is Brian Smith, and I am with Tribal Democracy Project. Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on the HB 2004 ballot language before you, to ensure that our communities' voices are heard in this process.

Tribal Democracy Project is a recently formed organization created to address the systemic issues of voter disenfranchisement of Oregon's Tribal Communities. Our work centers on implementation of non-partisan get out the vote operations and promoting electoral reforms that we believe will better empower Native voters.

One of the barriers to voting in Oregon's elections that Tribal Communities experience is the lack of trust in federal and state governmental systems. We've seen high turnout for Tribal elections, and then much lower turnout in state and federal elections from the same community. We know that creating trust and faith within our statewide electoral system is crucial to effectively engage Tribal and Native voters, and this includes how our communities interact with ballot measures.

Today, I am testifying to raise our concerns about the current LC drafted ballot language. We believe that giving our communities the chance to rank candidates will help increase participation within Tribal Communities - but that the ballot language as written will have the opposite effect by confusing and discouraging our communities from considering this issue on their November 2024 ballots. The ballot caption, results statement, and summary use jargon is not familiar or comprehensible to the communities we work with, nor to the average voter.

For all voters to appropriately assess what they are voting on, they should have access to the most foundational knowledge related to that topic. Given the chronic disenfranchisement of Natives under American electoral systems, it is even more crucial that the ballot language for HB 2004 provides a holistic overview of how the current electoral system works. This includes describing how the current ballot style functions, in which voters may only pick one candidate in a given race, and also describing that the candidate with the largest number of votes is the winning candidate, even if they don't reach a majority of votes. Both of these components are foundational to any voter to understand how our current electoral system works and are currently missing from the ballot language as drafted.

Additionally, we are also concerned about the jargon that is included in the drafted ballot language. Based on our previous voter outreach, we have found that using straightforward language when discussing topics like electoral systems is the best approach, since electoral systems can be a wonky topic in and of themselves. For example, steering away from using acronyms like "RCV," and instead fully spelling out the term "ranked choice voting" if jargon needs to be used at all. This will vastly reduce

any potential confusion voters would experience. On top of that, explaining what ranked choice voting actually is and describing that it is a voting method that gives voters the ability to rank their preferred candidates, further cements a broader understanding of how this system works. Also, using the term "threshold of votes" within the ballot summary is another point of possible confusion. Although advocates and experts may be familiar with this term, it is not a colloquial term that is readily recognizable to most community members. Rather than use a technical term, the ballot language should instead explain what that threshold actually is, which in this case, is a majority of votes.

We believe that building trust within our electoral system includes ensuring that voters have accessible materials, information, and ballot language, as they consider a wide range of issues. We thank you for your help crafting ballot language for HB 2004 that will produce clearer understanding for all voters.

With appreciation,

Brian Smith

Co-Director

Tribal Democracy Project