

June 2, 2023

To: Senate Rules Committee

Re: SB 775 Soil and Water Conservation District Board Eligibility

Chair Lieber and Committee Members,

I would like to submit this letter of support for SB 775. SB 775 seeks to update the eligibility rules for soil and water conservation districts so candidates for zoned seats in districts with populations of over 250,000 do not have to own or manage at least 10 acres of land. I believe this is a long overdue update to the current statute. This helps correct a classist and racist law that prevents accurate and fair representation in our district. I live in East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District, and it is important to be to have a fair and accurate representation of our area.

Below are some of my reasons for support:

- The statute that limits eligible candidates for zoned seats to those who own or manage at least 10 acres does not realistically address the needs of Soil and Water districts with larger populations and significant urban considerations when making policy decisions regarding soil and water health.
- As someone who lives in an urban area, farms are not the only important elected voice needed for districts with larger populations. We care about urban tree canopies, stormwater runoff, pesticide use in back yards, and other issues that farm voices aren't focused on. A diversity of perspectives is critical.
- For those of us living in urban neighborhoods, it's unrealistic to believe that any of us will own or manage 10 acres of land.
- I am a constituent in the affected districts and don't own land and worry that with emerging issues in cities, these more populated districts need to have a more diverse set of perspectives than our rural neighbors – such as urban tree canopies, stormwater management, pesticide use in yards, native planting and drought tolerant plants to mitigate growing water shortages, heat islands, etc.
- There is a chronic issue of vacancies on these important boards. If there were a lot of people running for these seats, this might not be as big an issue. However, that's not the case. As a matter of fact, SWCD's are long known for having the same people sitting on their boards because they can't find another qualified candidate to run for their seats.

Thank you for your consideration,



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