

# Oregon Capital Chronicle

## COMMENTARY

# Oregon legislative proposal would expand voter rolls

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If you vote in Oregon, you're probably accustomed to a relatively convenient, [accessible voting process](#), giving Oregon one of the [highest voter participation rates](#) of any state in the country.

Such an achievement didn't happen overnight. It's been long in the making. But there is more work to be done. This session the Legislature is considering a proposal that would expand Oregon's history of increasing voter rolls and making voting easier.

Oregon began experimenting with vote-by-mail in the 1980s, and by 2000 was the first state in the country to extend mail-in voting for all elections. Other Oregon election practices have strengthened voter access too, like well-run county election offices, conveniently located drop boxes and more recently, prepaid postage for returning ballots.

Even more striking, Oregon has pioneered a modernized voter registration system that makes registration more convenient, accurate, and secure. In 2016, Oregon [launched](#) the country's first modernized voter registration program, sometimes referred to as automatic voter registration, which partially automates the process for millions of eligible Oregonians who interact with the state's Department of Motor Vehicles.

Through Oregon's "[Motor Voter](#)" automatic registration, the state Department of Motor Vehicles, a government agency that interacts with a vast number of Oregonians, helps ensure the security, accuracy and inclusiveness of Oregon's voter registration rolls. Anyone eligible to vote who gets or renews a driver's license or updates their contact information with the DMV is flagged for the Elections Division so that they are automatically registered to vote.

The idea is to proactively assist eligible Oregonians to register to vote, as we interact with government agencies. By streamlining the process, it becomes more convenient for voters, more efficient for election workers, and more accurate and secure for everyone. There are now far fewer handwritten voter registration cards and less data entry, but many more registered voters.

In fact, Oregon's automatic voter registration program has more than quadrupled state voter registration numbers, while [diversifying its voting pool more than ever before](#). And at latest count, [22 states and Washington DC have since followed Oregon's lead](#), implementing their own programs.

Now the Oregon Legislature is considering the next step: [House Bill 2107](#) would build on the state's successful automatic voter registration program and expand it to include a second public agency. The bill would add the Oregon Health Authority as an additional state agency to assist in voter registration by forwarding information about Medicaid members to the Secretary of State's Office.

This is a good next step because the agency collects the relevant data, including citizenship status, which affects voting eligibility. And it interacts with thousands of eligible but unregistered voters, as well as thousands more who are registered but who may face more urgent challenges than keeping their voter registration updated. One in three Oregonians use Medicaid as their health insurance.

Do we need to reach more voters?

For those who say no, well, I would counter, who would you leave behind?

If we want Oregon elections to fully reflect the will of the people, then every eligible Oregonian who wants to participate should have easy access to register and vote.

Registering to vote shouldn't be a chore – for you, me, or anyone else.



**Kate Titus** is executive director of Common Cause Oregon, a nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to upholding the core values of American democracy. Titus is an expert in democracy, campaign finance reform and grassroots organizing and stands as a leading voice in Oregon's voting rights space.