June 20, 2023

To: House Rules Committee, Julie Fahey (Chair)

Re: SB 775 Soil and Water Conservation District Board Eligibility

Chair Fahey and Committee Members,

I am submitting 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 live within the East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District and Tawna Sanchez is my State Representative (District 43).

I believe the proposed changes to the current statute are long overdue. Foremost, as a taxpayer in the East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District I find it troubling that I can't run for a seat or be represented by someone with circumstances similar to my own in a county in which I live and pay taxes. For those of us living in urban neighborhoods, it's unrealistic to believe that we will own or manage 10 acres of land. There are no restrictions to run for other special districts such as school boards, fire districts, etc., that use public tax dollars and hold open elections by ballot. I don't believe there should be a land ownership restriction for the most populous soil and water conservation districts in Oregon either.

Beyond the issue of taxation without representation, as a constituent and homeowner living within the East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation I am interested in and concerned about emerging issues in cities– 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. It would be beneficial in Oregon's more populous districts, like Multnomah County, to have a more diverse set of perspectives on our district boards.

Let's update this outdated statute and allow all comers to run for the office and hope that the most qualified candidate for that zone wins.

Thank you for your consideration,

Dennis Brown
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