

RE: Support Guaranteeing the Right to Vote, SB 579
Senate Committee on Judiciary

1/23/2023

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Aanna Alba Farhang and I live in Multnomah County. I am writing to testify in strong support for Guaranteeing the Right to Vote, SB 579, which will ensure every eligible Oregonian can register to vote, update their voter registration, and vote in elections based on where they resided prior to incarceration.

The right to vote is enshrined in our constitution and fundamental to a vibrant and participatory democracy. Yet, around 12,000 people in Oregon are currently denied their right to vote, leading to low-income, Black, Indigenous, and Latine people being disproportionately disenfranchised. Guaranteeing the Right to Vote fulfills the promise of our democracy while improving public safety, and addressing racial and socioeconomic inequities.

Oregon is a leader in championing democratic principles and is one of the easiest states to vote in. Expanding voting rights to incarcerated individuals will strengthen our democracy, aligning with Oregon's rich tradition making voting as inclusive and accessible as possible. While I fully believe that crimes should be appropriately punished, incarcerated individuals do not deserve to have their civil rights as citizens stripped from them. Right now, our democracy does not have all of its voices at the table. By passing Guaranteeing the Right to Vote we can ensure Oregon embodies the whole Oregonian people.

As an Oregonian, I know that connection to community through civic engagement while incarcerated leads to healthier communities; that voting is a civic right and responsibility; that we can address unjust impacts of mass incarceration.

I am not alone - this legislation is supported by 40 civil rights organizations, faith-based groups, as well as dozens of currently and formerly incarcerated people. The time is now to lead the nation - please ensure that Guaranteeing the Right to Vote, SB 579, is passed out of committee.

Thank you,

Aanna Alba Farhang