

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

January 25, 2023

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

My name is Erika and I live in St. Paul. 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 the disproportionate disenfranchisement of low-income, Black, Indigenous, and Latine people. Guaranteeing the Right to Vote fulfills the promise of our democracy while improving public safety, and addressing racial and socioeconomic inequities.

I am a white and my spouse is black. It shocks me how often I find that our society is split - the issues we worry about, the troubles we face, etc. We all know that incarceration is disproportionate to how it affects racial minorities. It is important to me on a personal level that ALL people are able to vote, regardless of their race or personal decisions.

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, and that we can address unjust impacts of mass incarceration.

I am not alone in my support for this important bill. This legislation is supported by over 40 civil rights organizations, faith-based groups, as well as dozens of currently and formerly incarcerated people. Please ensure that Guaranteeing the Right to Vote, SB 579, is passed out of committee.

Thank you,

Erika Willis