

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

January 24, 2023

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

My name is Katie Hardiman and I live in Portland. I am a recent law school where I focused my studies and internships in criminal law. 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.

In order to make any real headway in criminal justice reform, people who personally understand what it means and feels like to be incarcerated must be able to vote. Without the right to vote, politicians and policy advocates will continue to push criminal justice reform to the backburner because they know that they won't be losing votes because the people most impacted cannot even offer them a vote. Our state, and our country, would not have any updated amendments or laws protecting marginalized communities if people from within those marginalized communities could not vote. This has been true for most marginalized communities at one point in time. There is a direct correlation between granting a women's right to vote and gender reform legislation, granting the right for Black people to vote and increased racial justice legislation- the list goes on.

Further, many people are incarcerated because of acts that stem directly from difficult childhoods, lack of resources, and/or poverty. So many Oregonians who best know what could help kids in the communities they grew up in- what could have helped *them* and not led them to crime- are incarcerated. To ensure that Oregonian children throughout the state are accepted and nurtured by society to help keep them out of trouble, having insight from children who did not have that privilege is incredibly important in addition to the many Oregonians who can already vote that did have that privilege. In addition, thousands of people who are incarcerated have children of their own. Those children should not have to miss out on their parent voting for their rights because the parent is incarcerated.

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,
Katie Hardiman