

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

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

01/26/2023

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

My name is Frank So, the President of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO), and I am writing 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.

EMO is dedicated to civil and religious freedom, and social and political equality. Our decisions and actions are made with the vision of a world free from injustice, exploitation, and human deprivation. For these reasons, we believe every U.S. citizen deserves to have a voice in the democratic process through way of voting rights, including currently incarcerated individuals.

When a person is convicted of a crime, they are punished through loss of liberty. However, they still retain their citizenship and should still have a say in their society. The majority of people in prison will be released back into society. How are people expected to integrate back into a society that has changed, and changed without their say in the matter? Removing a person's right to vote is a gross injustice. It separates the person from society and serves no benefit in the interest of justice.

Restricting the right to vote began as a racist strategy to hinder the Black vote. After slavery was abolished, several Black Codes were enforced hindering the economic, social, and cultural growth of the Black community. Once these codes were outlawed for their explicit racism, Jim Crow laws and mass incarceration continued to disenfranchise low-income, Black, Indigenous, and people of color. In Oregon, 9% of incarcerated people are Black, despite Black people accounting for only 2% of the state's residents. Ensuring incarcerated people the right to vote is a tremendous step towards racial and economic equality in Oregon.

Guaranteeing the right to vote fulfills the promise of our democracy while improving public safety, and addressing racial and socioeconomic inequities. EMO urges you to pass SB 579 out of committee.



Frank So
President
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

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