

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 Rose Wilde and I am with Springfield-Eugene Chapter of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ). We are a local chapter of a national volunteer organization mobilizing for racial and economic justice, with a membership of 700-800 supporters. We are part of a broad coalition that has the support of over 40 civil rights organizations, faith-based groups, as well as dozens of currently and formerly incarcerated people. 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 Latinx people being disproportionately disenfranchised.

**Because of mass incarceration, low income, Black, Indigenous, and communities of color are disproportionately denied the right to vote.**

- Due to biases and inequities in our criminal legal system, low-income, Black, Indigenous, and people of color are more likely to be incarcerated. For many people, life after prison only means partial citizenship, as formerly incarcerated people often experience limited opportunities for employment, housing, and voting. As we work to reimagine our criminal legal system, one of the first changes we can make is to restore voting rights to people who are most impacted by that system, inside and outside prisons.
- Blocking people with felony convictions from voting started in the Jim Crow era as an intentional strategy to keep Black people from voting because they are disproportionately impacted by the biased criminal legal system. In Oregon, 9% of incarcerated people are Black, despite Black people accounting for only 2% of the state's residents. Guaranteeing the right to vote, including those who are or have been incarcerated, ensures all people have a voice in our democracy.

- People in prison face issues unique to their incarceration that often go unaddressed by public officials. COVID-19 illustrated the unique issues that people in prison can face. In October, The Oregonian reported that COVID-19 cases were 10 times higher in Oregon prisons than in the state broadly. I personally advocated for an incarcerated person in Oregon's prisons, getting to know about his plight through a former colleague, his sister. He almost died due to his fragile medical state and COVID infection resulting from inhumane, unsafe treatment within the system. It was clear that no one cared about his health within the system, and without the persistence of his sister, he might not have survived. He deserves to have his voice heard in our political system.

Guaranteeing the Right to Vote fulfills the promise of our democracy while improving public safety, and addressing racial and socioeconomic inequities. As a representative of Showing Up for Racial Justice we ask that you please support SB 579 and pass it out of committee.

Thank you,

Rose Wilde  
(she/her)  
Coordinating Council Member  
Showing up for Racial Justice, Springfield-Eugene Chapter