



To: Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary

RE: SB 579 – Support

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee, for the record, my name is Creeana Bort, I am a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation, and I represent the NAYA Action Fund located in Portland, OR. Founded by the community for the community, NAYA Action Fund is a 501(c)(4) social welfare organization with a mission to expand political advocacy and build electoral power in partnership with the Native community. The NAYA Action Fund provides tools to shape public policy, cultivate leadership, and elect champions for issues impacting Native people. Our vision of systemic change is youth-centered, family-driven, and elder guided. I write in support of SB 579.

This history of Native Americans obtaining the right to vote is long-winded, with many obstacles put in place by governmental systems. In recent decades, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law in 1965, prohibiting barriers to political participation by racial and ethnic minorities. However, Native Americans and other indigenous identities continued to see barriers to expressing their voting rights. Even though the act specified that one could not deny the right to vote on account of race, cannot create and implement literacy tests, or other barriers that were often utilized against communities of color to perpetuate systemic racism and white privilege. This was done to decrease generational wealth and advancement of minorities. Even as recently as 2002, the government passed the Help Americans Vote Act (HAVA) to increase accessibility to minorities which included making universal standards for states to follow primarily surrounding updating outdated voting methods and administration, which mainly targeted low-income areas.

Senate Bill 579 aims to tackle another barrier put in place for not only American Indian/Alaskan Natives but all minority groups. Based on the Federal Bureau of Prisons, minority populations make up 42.4% of the prison's population; of that, 2.6% are American Indian. Within the state of Oregon, based on the Issue Brief by the Oregon Department of Corrections, there are approximately 372 Native Americans currently in prison, which equates to about 3% of Oregon's prison population. That may not seem a lot, but when we look at the demographics of those registered to vote in Oregon compared to the number of American Indian/Alaska Natives within Oregon in total, around 185,723, which is only about 4% of Oregon's total population according to the 2020 U.S Census. SB 579 asks the legislature to look at how Oregon treats our prison population, one comprised of minority groups that have been historically oppressed, experiencing higher rates of recidivism, and being continually burdened by the systemic racism engrained in the judicial system today.

On behalf of the NAYA Action Fund, we urge you to pass SB 579. It's time we modernize our systems to include our most marginalized communities – the prison population being one of them.

Sincerely,

A small, rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script, which appears to read "Creeana Bort".



Creeana Bort
Policy and Advocacy Organizer
NAYA Action Fund