



Justice Advocates, a grassroots criminal justice reform organization in the Portland area, supports SB 579 because all adult citizens in prison in Oregon should be allowed to vote.

Besides the goal of rehabilitation, another important goal of policies dealing with imprisoned persons ought to be to help them become contributing members of our communities when they return. Denial of the basic right of an otherwise eligible citizen to vote is an immediate step in the wrong direction, saying “Don’t think that it’s any business of yours how our democracy chooses leaders and enacts laws.”

Under current Oregon law, persons convicted of misdemeanors, persons detained awaiting trial, and those serving time but released on probation or parole can exercise their right to vote; only persons incarcerated for a felony conviction are prevented from voting. There is no such restriction in Maine, Vermont, Puerto Rico, or the District of Columbia—nor is there any reason for Oregon to continue such a barrier.

Outdated and arbitrary discriminations against voting, such as poll taxes and literacy tests, have long been repudiated. It’s time for the next step. Let’s restore the vote to all our citizens.