



Testimony in Support of SB 579  
Gloria Ochoa-Sandoval, Unite Oregon  
January 26, 2023

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 579, Guaranteeing the Right to Vote. My name is Gloria Ochoa-Sandoval and I am the Policy Director at Unite Oregon. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of our 32,542 members. Our organization is led by people of color, immigrants and refugees, rural communities, and people experiencing poverty, as we work across Oregon to build a unified intercultural movement for justice.

Unite Oregon was originally established to combat widespread anti-Muslim sentiment after 9/11. Since then, we continue to organize against targeting and profiling of our membership demographics. Blocking people with felony convictions from voting started in the Jim Crow era and was an intentional strategy to keep Black people from voting because they are disproportionately impacted by the biased criminal legal system. Today, we still see the impact of disenfranchisement fulfilling its original purpose. Due to biases and inequities in our legal system, low-income, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people are still more likely to be incarcerated, and thus, are disenfranchised at disproportionately higher rates. In Oregon, 9% of incarcerated people are Black, whereas Black people are 2% of the state's residents.<sup>1</sup> This is unacceptable. We must end the legacy of disenfranchisement in Oregon.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-oregon.pdf>



Additionally, recidivism rates are high in part because for many people, life after prison only means partial citizenship, as formerly incarcerated people often experience limited opportunities for employment, housing, and voting. Making sure Oregonians can vote while incarcerated allows them to feel involved in their communities, and increases the success of reintegration when they come back. Research suggests that restoring voting rights to people impacted by the criminal legal system could aid their transition back into community life. In one study, among individuals who had been arrested previously, 27% of non-voters were rearrested, compared with 12% of voters.

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, those inside prisons.

Our right to vote is constitutional and fundamental to a representative democracy. Unite Oregon asks you to support our membership in Guaranteeing the Right to Vote by voting yes to move Senate Bill 579 out of committee.

Thank you,

Gloria Ochoa-Sandoval

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Policy Director,

unite oregon

Unite Oregon