



Guaranteeing the Right to Vote

10/26/2023

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

My name is Nick Keough, and I am the Legislative Director of the Oregon Student Association. **I'm writing today to ask for your support on SB 579.**

Oregon Student Association advocates for the interests of students in postsecondary institutions in Oregon. Our work is built around the simple principle that when people have a voice in the decisions being made that impact them, better decisions get made. One way that principle plays out in our work is when we register students to vote and encourage them to engage in the political process. Through this work, we see time and time again the importance of civic engagement and how it links to the ability of communities to get their needs met.

It is for that reason that our student leaders feel that restoring the voting rights of incarcerated Oregonians is critical. 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 the disproportionate disenfranchisement of low-income, Black, Indigenous, and Latine people. Guaranteeing the Right to Vote fulfills the promise of our democracy while improving public safety, and addressing racial and socioeconomic inequities. Oregonians who are incarcerated and their families are impacted by the decisions of elected officials, and therefore it does not serve the democratic process not to allow them to participate in voting.

I am always appreciative of the warm reception legislators give the students OSA brings to the Capitol. They tell our students they love hearing from them. They tell our students their voice matters. They understand that the students are there because the decisions made in the Capitol impact these students. The fact is, given the existence of groundbreaking programs such as the University of Oregon's Inside Out Program, as well as partnerships between the Oregon Department of Corrections and community colleges such as Chemeketa Community College, Southwestern Oregon Community College, and Central Oregon Community College, there are Oregon students who are incarcerated right now; they are being impacted by the decisions made in the Capitol in many, many ways, and yet they cannot vote. **At OSA we see that their voice matters too, and that Oregon has an opportunity to be a leader by affirming that fact through passing SB 579. We urge you to support this bill.**

Thank you,

Nick Keough
Legislative Director
Oregon Student Association
nick@orstudents.org

OREGON STUDENT ASSOCIATION

635 NE Dekum St, Portland, OR, 97211 | (817) 889-0787 | www.orstudents.org | @OregonStudents