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On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary
Measure: SB579

I was incarcerated for over 15 years. During that time a number of very important elections occurred, with significant impact on policies involving the national and state justice system, as well as correctional systems. Because I was incarcerated I was unable to vote, though these elections impacted me significantly. Though ending up incarcerated does mean that the individual has broken the community trust, while a person is incarcerated Oregon requires them to either work or participate in a program full time. As a result, most of the AICs are actively contributing to maintaining their community and are no longer a threat to public safety. If incarceration is primarily for public safety and is not meant to be punitive as the ODOC mission statement purports, then restricting the right to vote on issues and candidates that will have an impact on the restricted individuals - and perhaps outsized impact given how nearly every aspect of an AIC's life is controlled by the state government that is elected through such voting - does not fit within that model.

Anecdotal and backed by evidence, when an AIC is connected to the outside community - whether through programs in their facility, family, or friends - they have substantially better outcomes upon release. From personal experience I find this to be true. A good part of that is related to resources because those with these connections typically also have increased access to supporting resources. However, a significant part of success related to this support is because the AIC feels a responsibility and connection to the community. Allowing AICs to vote while incarcerated may provide some of these folks their first opportunity to vote and participate in the governing process, and may provide a sense of agency the individual would otherwise not feel. The sense that an individual had some input on their elected officials, as well as the policies and regulations which govern the lives of every American and Oregonian may bolster this sense of community belonging and reciprocity.

I have some concern about ensuring that an AIC's vote is tallied in the county of origin. Many AICs are currently housed in facilities that are not in their home county/district, yet they will be released back to their original county and be under the authority of those jurisdictions and ordinances. I strongly advocate that an AIC's vote is tallied in their district of origin so that they are voting for candidates and issues that will affect their home district.