



**Submitted to the Senate Committee On Judiciary on
Thursday, January 27, 2023
Testimony in Support of SB 579
By Andy Ko, Executive Director, Partnership for Safety & Justice**

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

At Partnership for Safety & Justice, we advocate for public safety and criminal justice policies that ensure accountability, equity, and healing for people convicted of crime, crime survivors, and the families and communities of both. For over 20 years, our work has promoted public safety with policies that keep families together, reduce racial disparities, and invest in communities across Oregon.

Partnership for Safety and Justice prioritizes solutions to crime that address the needs of individuals impacted by crime, including those responsible for causing harm. These needs include equal justice under law; equitable access to the political, civic, and material benefits of our society; and full participation in American democracy as the foundation of our nation and the diverse communities from which it is formed.

Elimination of chattel slavery, repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, and extension of the right to vote to all genders were among many other steps taken to include individuals and their communities in essential aspects of American life, such as participatory democracy. Attempts to justify the disenfranchisement of incarcerated citizens usually hinge on fallacious, stigma-based assertions that they are unworthy or are incapable of responsibly casting their vote with millions of other Americans – none of whom are screened for moral fitness or sufficient wisdom to vote.

The disenfranchisement of incarcerated people clearly does nothing to increase public safety. On the contrary, disenfranchisement likely has the opposite effect: further alienation of thousands of Oregonians and millions of our fellow Americans from our democratic process and a missed opportunity to strengthen their commitment to the laws and norms of the communities to which nearly all of them will return. Not clear is how disenfranchising incarcerated people benefits anyone, including political parties worried that permitting incarcerated people to vote would harm their candidates' chances for election. Perhaps counterintuitively, there is some evidence that allowing incarcerated people to vote might have the opposite effect.

In Oregon, we are fortunate that our electoral system and the values it serves have been, for the most part, honored and reinforced by our candidates for office – most notably by those in the intensely contested 2022 gubernatorial race. That tradition is worth protecting by deliberate steps to strengthen democratic participation among *all* Oregonians, including those who have lost their physical freedom during a term of incarceration.

Partnership for Safety and Justice strongly supports Senate Bill 579 and the restoration of voting rights to incarcerated people in Oregon.