

Submitter: Benjamin Barnett  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary  
Measure: SB579

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

My name is Rabbi Benjamin Barnett and I live in Portland. I am writing to testify in strong support for Guaranteeing the Right to Vote, SB 579, which will ensure every eligible Oregonian can register to vote, update their voter registration, and vote in elections based on where they resided prior to incarceration.

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 low-income, Black, Indigenous, and Latine people being disproportionately disenfranchised. Guaranteeing the Right to Vote fulfills the promise of our democracy while improving public safety, and addressing racial and socioeconomic inequities.

I am the rabbi of Havurah Shalom in Portland. While I do not speak for all my congregants, I know that the vast majority of them share my conviction that the ways in which we disenfranchise people due to felony convictions is unjust and does not make our communities or our state safer. On the contrary, it negatively impacts us in concrete ways as well as morally. My people have known the experience of being marginalized and oppressed. We do not abide the ways in which marginalized communities today bear the brunt of an unjust criminal legal system. This bill will be one step toward addressing these wrongs.

As an Oregonian, I know that connection to community through civic engagement while incarcerated leads to healthier communities, that voting is a civic right and responsibility, and that we can address unjust impacts of mass incarceration.

I am not alone. This legislation is supported by over 40 civil rights organizations, faith-based groups, as well as dozens of currently and formerly incarcerated people. Please ensure that Guaranteeing the Right to Vote, SB 579, is passed out of committee.

Thank you,

Rabbi Benjamin Barnett  
Havurah Shalom, Portland