

House Committee on Rules  
February 14, 2023  
Jeanne Atkins, Former Secretary of State  
Testimony opposing House Bill 2585

Chair Fahey and Committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my position on House Bill 2585, which would repeal the 2015 legislation establishing automatic voter registration in Oregon.

I had the honor and responsibility of leading the implementation of this program after its adoption by the legislature. With some pride, I have been following the successes of Automatic Voter Registration in achieving its goal of increasing the number of eligible Oregonians who are registered and who vote in each election cycle. We were the first state to take this action, but in part because of our leadership, there are now 22 states that have some form of automatic registration.

Before the program began in January of 2016, the Secretary of State's office took very seriously the need to understand what doubts and concerns there were – among lawmakers and our fellow citizens -- so that those could be addressed in the administrative rules adopted for implementation. I think the program's success is largely due to an effective rulemaking process which included a diverse rulemaking advisory committee, extensive discussions with County Clerks, and public hearings held around the state to get reactions to the draft rules. Every effort was made to respond to concerns that were raised during the legislative process or otherwise brought to our attention by the public.

Oregon's work in this area has been widely praised and recognized as a success. Individual or systemic problems that have arisen since its passage have been few and have been resolved quickly.

There is no evidence that public support for this program has diminished over its now-seven years of operation. Initially, there were arguments that Oregonians would not like the idea of being "automatically" registered and would object to the program. In fact, we almost immediately found the opposite to be true. When the first batch of letters was sent informing people of their registration and their opportunity to opt-out, special staff was hired by the Secretary of State's office to respond to what many predicted would be a chorus of objections. Within days, the need for additional staff disappeared. Yes, some government critics registered their disapproval. But in point of fact, a far greater number of the complaints received by the Secretary of State in the first year of AVR implementation were those raised by folks whose registration was not finalized by election day – due to the requirement that the registration is held for 21 days in order to allow people to "opt-out" if they wish.

Automatic Voter Registration has operated successfully for the past seven years. It is convenient for the public, secure in its operation, and made Oregon the number one state in the country for voter turnout. Repeal would serve no purpose other than to move the state backward with no evidence or rationale to do so. I urge the committee to take no action on HB 2585.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanne Atkins