

RE: Support Guaranteeing the Right to Vote, SB 579

May 3, 2023



Co-Chairs Steiner, Sanchez, and members of the committee,

My name is Isabela Villarreal and I am the Policy and Communications Director at Next Up Action Fund. Our mission is to build political power with diverse young people to achieve a more just and equitable Oregon. As an organization that builds political power and strong, effective leadership pipelines for diverse young people, our work and our communities are greatly impacted by the issue of voter disenfranchisement. Accordingly, we strongly support Guaranteeing the Right to Vote, Senate Bill 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.

We have diligently worked to shape our elections system for nearly two decades, with a highlight reel of victories that includes paid postage for ballots, the nation's first-ever automatic voter registration law, online voter registration, and more. Our work has contributed toward Oregon being one of the best states to vote in. We're constantly thinking about how we can improve our election systems and dismantle structural barriers so that those who are left out and left behind by our democracy can have their voices heard.

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 Latinx people being disproportionately disenfranchised.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oregon.gov/doc/Documents/inmate-profile.pdf>;  
<https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-oregon.pdf>

Guaranteeing the right to vote is a concept that we have been working toward for five years. From working with young men at MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility, to now working with a broad, cross-movement coalition of more than 40 civil rights organizations, and faith-based groups throughout Oregon, and dozens of currently and formerly incarcerated people - we know that voting is a civil right. I have uploaded supplementary materials including a one pager that further details the benefits of this bill and who is part of our coalition.

To continue to delineate who we restore rights to based on their sentencing is a failure to recognize the unimpeachable rights that we hold. Voter disenfranchisement denies the humanity, autonomy, and citizenship of incarcerated community members. SB 579 is a comprehensive solution to overturn restrictions on civil rights and an important step toward affirming the voting rights of all eligible Oregonians.

Please pass SB 579 out of committee, and affirm the humanity and value of all Oregonians once again; because a right without access, is not a right at all.

Thank you,

Isabela Villarreal

Policy and Communications Director