

Submitter: Joseph Falzone
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

Dear Co- Chairs Steiner and Sanchez, and Members of the Joint Ways and Means Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Oregon's funding priorities. My name is Joseph Falzone and I'm here as a volunteer ACLU advocate to speak about the ACLU of Oregon's 2023 Legislative Agenda.

I support the ACLU of Oregon's agenda this year which centers on racial justice, civil rights and civil liberties. One of their top priorities among others is Improving the quality and diversity of representation by ensuring legislators are paid a livable wage (SB 786)

As Oregonians, we want legislators who share our experiences and can bring community-centric solutions to the state Capitol.

At 42 years old I've lived a majority of my life pretending to be someone I'm not. Oregon is my eleventh state that I've lived in, and it's the community I found here that truly allowed me to be myself. Spending a lifetime hiding, feeling guilty and ashamed of who I am, hoping that one day I could have a "normal" life. This is a story millions of Americans share, but it doesn't have to be this way. If growing up I had more influential figures around me I could relate to, perhaps my journey here wouldn't of been such a long and painful one. Tragically we know without this representation many peoples journeys end too soon. I know firsthand how important this is, and I believe in rising up voices for those who have lacked one in the past.

A big hurdle in achieving this is the low legislative salary which leaves out swaths of good leaders simply because they cannot afford to be one. Many legislators are required to have independent wealth, retirement income, family support or a second job to make ends meet. This leaves many BIPOC individuals and parenting people unheard and unseen in Salem. Raising legislative pay will allow more leaders to run for office and voters will have more choice in who they choose to represent them.

Equality to me is knowing that there's other peoples voices out there more important than my own. I urge you to fund this vital policy (SB786) as it's in alignment with Oregon values and will make our communities stronger and safer.

Diversity in representation matters,
Thank you.