

**Testimony to the Senate Rules Committee
on SB 775**

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

OEC supports SB 775. SB 775 will update the eligibility rules for soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) by amending the current requirement for SWCD board members to own or manage at least 10 acres of land. Under the proposed changes, candidates for zoned seats in districts with populations of over 250,000 will not be required to own or manage at least 10 acres of land. This is a long overdue update to the current statute.

SWCDs are important leaders, partners and collaborators in helping to protect and manage Oregon's water and land resources. It is a mistake to assume their valuable services and relationships are only relevant in rural areas. They have much to offer to urban management of natural resources – planning, accessing federal funding and implementing natural infrastructure for water, such as stormwater and wastewater management; offering outreach and educations to urban gardeners and landscapers around low-impact pest management, just as they do for rural landowners and agricultural producers; and working with urban land and water managers on urban-specific challenges such as urban tree canopies, drought tolerant landscaping and water management practices, and practices to protect pollinators and other wildlife.

Under the current land ownership/management requirements for zoned board seats, urban SWCDs face an ongoing challenge of filling vacancies on these important boards. In fact, urban SWCDs are known for having the same people sitting on their boards for multiple terms because they cannot find another qualified candidate to run for open positions. Few urban residents own or manage a full 10 acres within an urban area. The land ownership/management requirement creates unintended racial and economic inequities in a system intended to support and encourage local residents to participate in good resource management for their communities.

SB 775 only affects six soil and water conservation districts in Oregon because it only applies to districts with a population of over 250,000. This update recognizes that smaller more rural districts aren't necessarily having to deal with urban issues as they relate to soil and water health.

SB 775 is a reasonable compromise that responds to actual needs. OEC strongly urges you to support SB 775.