



May 22, 2023

Dear Chair Lieber and Senate Rules Committee Members,

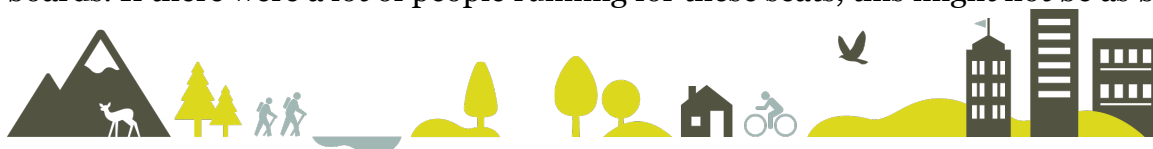
On behalf of The Intertwine Alliance, I would like to submit this letter of support for SB 775.

SB 775 seeks to update the eligibility rules for soil and water conservation districts so that candidates for zoned seats in districts with populations over 250,000 are no longer required to own or manage at least 10 acres of land. We believe this is a long overdue update to the current statute.

The Intertwine Alliance is a Portland metro regional coalition that advocates for parks, trails, nature and equitable access to nature for all communities. Our 70 formal partners, and many more informal partners, are public agencies, nonprofit organizations and private businesses.

The current statute that limits eligible candidates for zoned seats to those who own or manage at least 10 acres does not realistically address the needs of Soil and Water districts with larger populations and significant urban considerations when making policy decisions regarding soil and water health. Several of the SWCDs within the Portland metropolitan region fit this description. Removing the ownership requirement for areas with populations over 250,000 will allow those districts to attract a larger pool of qualified applicants and better address priority issues, including not only agricultural impacts but also challenges such as stormwater runoff, development impacts, green infrastructure and more.

Expanding the applicant pool will better allow SWCDs to recruit people with expertise in engaging urban populations. Expanding the applicant pool will also increase the potential to attract more diverse candidates to serve on boards, which is essential to advance equity objectives. There is a chronic issue of vacancies on these important boards. If there were a lot of people running for these seats, this might not be as big an



issue. However, that's not the case. As a matter of fact, SWCDs are long known for having the same people sitting on their boards year after year, because they can't find another qualified candidate to run for their seats.

Thank you for your consideration.

Tara Wilkinson
Director
The Intertwine Alliance

