



May 18, 2023

To: Senate Rules Committee

Re: SB 775 Soil and Water Conservation District Board Eligibility

Chair Lieber and Committee Members,

We would like to submit this letter of support for SB 775 on behalf of Rogue Farm Corps (RFC). Matt Gordon and I (Jennifer Hamilton) are the Co-Executive Directors. At RFC, we envision a world in which land is deeply cared for, power is equitably shared, and farms, ranches, and the people who work them flourish. We accomplish this by training and equipping the next generation of farmers and ranchers through hands-on educational programs and the preservation of farmland.

While Matt and I live in the East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District (EMSWCD), our organization represents and works with staff members, farmers, and ranchers statewide who live in several soil and water conservation districts, including the six districts that would be impacted by this bill.

Land access is a critical barrier for many of the people we serve. For BIPOC, women, and other marginalized groups, the barriers are even greater. Throughout the US and in Oregon, there is a history of racial exclusion, violence, and land theft that has left a legacy of injustice that is still being felt today through disparities in our food system and beyond. Decision-makers have systematically passed policies that limit access to land and capital for these groups. We are committed to dismantling the systemic disparities that continue to limit decision making powers to a select few.

Additionally, many of the farmers in our network operate small farms that are less than 10 acres. SB 775 seeks to update the eligibility rules for soil and water conservation districts so candidates for zoned seats in districts with populations of over 250,000 do not have to own or manage at least 10 acres of land. The 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 or the people we serve.



ROGUE FARM CORPS

We worry that with the emerging issues and the existing barriers to land access in or around urban cities, these more populated districts need to have a more diverse set of perspectives than is allowed by the current statute. The passing of SB 775 seems like a reasonable compromise that responds to actual needs. We understand that a diversity of perspectives is key to making policy decisions regarding soil and water health. We strongly believe this is a positive and proactive update to the current statute

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jennifer Hamilton".

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Matt Gordon".

Jennifer Hamilton & Matt Gordon, Co-Executive Directors
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