

May 22, 2023

To: Senate Rules Committee
Re: SB 775 Soil and Water Conservation District Board Eligibility

Chair Lieber and Committee Members,

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 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. We believe this is a long overdue update to the current statute.

I live in Senator Frederick's district and serve as the Executive Director of the East Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District. While I have deep respect for all the board members that serve currently, we have ever growing urban focused suite of needs and no one on our board truly represents issues that are core to the urban part of our district – from tree canopies to heat islands to stormwater runoff issues on impervious materials to green infrastructure generally. We need that diversity of perspective on our board to best serve all of our constituents. And, most of our tax base comes from inside the urban growth boundary and yet there are almost no people inside the UGB that manage much less own 10 acres or more of land. It simply isn't logical to restrict these zoned seats in this day and age, especially in districts that include urban centers.

SB 775 only impacts six soil and water conservation districts in Oregon because it only applies to districts with a population of over 250,000, recognizing that smaller more rural districts aren't necessarily having to deal with urban issues as they relate to soil and water health and likely have larger pools of candidates who actually own or manage 10 + acres of land. It seems like a reasonable compromise that responds to actual needs.

Thank you for your consideration,

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