

Susheela Jayapal



Multnomah County Commissioner, District 2

May 22, 2023

To: Senate Rules Committee

Re: SB 775 Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Board Eligibility

Chair Lieber and Committee Members,

I'm writing today in support of SB 775, legislation that would remove the landowning requirements for Soil and Water Conservation District Candidates in districts with populations over 250,000 candidates. As the Multnomah County Commissioner for District 2 representing North and Northeast Portland, this includes the SWCD that I represent (East Multnomah County District).

Currently, a candidate has to own or manage at least 10 acres of land to run for a zoned seat, drastically limiting the number of people that can run for this position, especially in Portland. As someone who represents an urban area, we need a diverse set of perspectives to tackle issues impacting our district, including urban tree canopies, stormwater runoff, pesticide use in backyards and heat islands. I have been a champion for those who have been marginalized, left behind and left out by our systems, and this legislation opens the door for more of my constituents to run for office and make important policy decisions regarding soil and water health. For those of us living in urban neighborhoods, it's unrealistic to believe that any of us will own or manage 10 acres of land.

I ran for the county commission four years ago because of my concern that in this very wealthy country, too many people were being left out, and left behind. I believe that all residents should be able to run for these seats as issues of soil and water impact everyone, and often impact people of color and marginalized communities that do not own land the most. This statutory update makes a lot of sense and is long overdue to bring the eligibility for candidates running for soil and water conservation district director positions in larger and more urbanized districts like East Multnomah County District.

This legislation would constitute an important step toward increasing representation in our elected offices, and I am glad to offer my support. Please contact me at district2@multco.us or 503-988-5253 if needed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susheela Jayapal".