

Submitter: Megan Panapa
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Rules
Measure: SB775

5/23/23

Chair Lieber and Committee Members,

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 775, which aims to update the eligibility rules for soil and water conservation districts. The current requirement that candidates for zoned seats must own or manage at least 10 acres of land creates unnecessary barriers and limits the pool of qualified candidates for these crucial positions. I believe it is essential to remove this restriction and allow anyone residing in a soil and water conservation district with a population of at least 250,000 people to run for office.

I am a resident of East Multnomah soil and water conservation district. This bill is of particular significance in our district as we have a very diverse group of people that bring important perspectives of our district but do not have the acreage to qualify for positions based on the current criteria.

The current statute that mandates a minimum of 10 acres of land ownership or management does not adequately address the unique needs of soil and water conservation districts with larger populations and significant urban considerations. It is crucial to update this statute to ensure that policy decisions related to soil and water health in these districts reflect the realities of urban environments.

SB 775 presents a common-sense and long overdue solution to the eligibility requirements for candidates running for soil and water conservation district director positions in larger, more urbanized districts. It is important to note that SB 775 only impacts six soil and water conservation districts in Oregon, as it specifically applies to districts with a population of over 250,000. This recognizes the distinct challenges faced by larger districts and represents a reasonable compromise that aligns eligibility with the actual needs of these districts.

Living in an urban area, I am ineligible to run for a seat due to the 10-acre ownership requirement. However, urban areas have unique concerns such as urban tree canopies, stormwater runoff, pesticide use in backyards, and other issues that require representation on soil and water conservation districts. Diverse perspectives are critical for addressing these urban-related challenges effectively. Owning or managing 10 acres of land is unrealistic for many of us residing in urban neighborhoods. It is essential to remove this arbitrary requirement that

disproportionately affects urban residents and enables a more diverse range of voices to contribute to the decisions impacting soil and water health.

As a constituent in the East Multnomah District, I believe that all individuals should have the opportunity to run for soil and water conservation district seats. Broadening eligibility ensures that voters have more choices and that qualified individuals from various backgrounds can contribute to the betterment of soil and water health.

I urge you to support SB 775 and prioritize the removal of the 10-acre land ownership/management requirement for zoned seats on soil and water conservation districts. This update will enhance the democratic process, foster inclusivity, and allow for a more comprehensive and effective representation of the diverse needs and perspectives within our communities.

Thank you for considering my support for SB 775. I believe that this legislative change is long overdue and will greatly benefit our soil and water conservation districts. I look forward to seeing positive advancements in this regard.

Sincerely,

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