

May 23, 2023

To: Senate Rules Committee

Re: SB 775 Soil and Water Conservation District Board Eligibility

Chair Lieber and Committee Members,

I am an elected member of the Board of Directors at East Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District and I would like to submit this letter of support for SB 775.

Under existing rules, most constituents in our district are ineligible to run for the three out of the five seats on our board that represent geographic zones because they do not own or manage 10 or more acres of land. There are no other elected positions in Oregon with a requirement like this and is a relic of inequitable policies from Oregon's past that needs to change.

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 current requirement is particularly problematic for highly urbanized districts like East Multnomah's, where only a tiny percentage of parcels are more than 10 acres, and only a tiny percentage of those landowners are interested in running for public office.

Many districts across the state overcome this hurdle by appointing Associate Directors, which are board members with no voting rights on the board, and one year of service as an associate director overcomes the 10 acre requirement, this making them eligible to run for a zone position. This leads to a cherry-picking of successors and flies in the face of our democratic process.

We are missing out on a diverse range of viewpoints on our board and I urge you to pass this long overdue update of the current statute so that our board can be more representative of the people we serve.

Thank you for your consideration,

Michael Guebert
Director, East Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District
Corbett, OR 97019