Testimony submitted by: LaJuana Decker
Committee: House Committee on Rules
Measure: HB3166

Chair Bowman, Vice-Chair Drazan, Vice-Chair Pham, and Members of the Rules Committee,

I am writing to express strong opposition to HB 3166. An open primary election ignores the rights of political parties to select their own candidate to advance to the general election. Open primaries are easily manipulated by hostile actors determined to see the opposing party nominate the weakest candidate, thereby gaining an advantage for their own candidate in the general election. This political manipulation generally flies under the radar of those who vote in good faith for the candidate they deem best, leaving the process vulnerable to schemers and stealthy dark-moneyed manipulation.

While some argue that the high percentage of non-affiliated voters in the state is a reason for open primaries, this argument ignores the rights of the majority of Oregon voters who have chosen to belong to a political party and who want to choose the candidate who best represents the views of that party. Even so, informed and engaged voters without party affiliation can easily change their registration before a primary to vote for the candidate they have decided best represents their views. The commitment to a party is easily reversed after the primary for those who prefer to remain unaffiliated with a party. Thus, in the current closed primary system, the rights of ALL voters are respected—no voter is left out of voting in the primary nomination process, and the rights of party members to nominate the candidate that best represents them on the ballot is preserved.

Petitioners have attempted to open Oregon's primary elections in the past, but have failed even to get enough signatures of Oregonians in favor of open primaries to put it on the ballot. Oregonians do not support open primaries.

Under the system proposed in HB 3166, five candidates advance to the general election, almost guaranteeing that the winner of the election would not be a candidate supported by the majority of voters. And this is where the writers of the bill have regrettably shown their disdain for the voters of Oregon. Last November, a sound majority (58%) of Oregon voters rejected Ranked Choice Voting. I am appalled that the sponsors of this bill would ignore the clear will of the voters and hide this aspect of the change to our voter process in Section 40 of the bill. Ranked Choice Voting has been tried, found wanting, and repealed in other jurisdictions. I did extensive research before casting my vote against it then, and I continue to oppose it now, as do the majority of Oregonians.

One section of this bill would be a positive change to Oregon's current elections. Section 42 suggests moving the presidential primary to March. Waiting until May to hold a primary election robs Oregonians of any say in the nomination process for U.S. President since by the date of our current May primary, the nominations have been all but sealed by the voters of other states. Changing the date of the presidential primary to the second Tuesday in March not only ensures that Oregon voters have a voice in the nomination process, but it also could bring presidential candidates to our state and encourage their attention to the issues that matter to Oregonians.

Thank you for considering my perspective on this bill. Because of its attempt to force Oregonians to conduct open primaries and to use the widely discredited ranked choice voting and tabulation of results rejected by Oregonians in November, I urge you to vote NO on HB3166.

Respectfully submitted,
LaJuana Decker