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March 10, 2015

To: Senate Rules Committee
Senator Diane Rosenbaum, Chair

From: James Ofsink
Chair, City Club of Portland Redistricting Committee
Chair, Redistricting Matters Coalition

Re: Support for SB 331

The City Club of Portland and the Redistricting Matters Coalition support SB 331 and reforming how inmates are counted for the purposes of redistricting.

Our support is anchored in two fundamental democratic principles: that all people should have equal representation, and that we have a geographically based democracy.

The City Club of Portland conducted a yearlong citizen research project from 2011-2012 and concluded (among several recommendations) that Oregon should join a growing list of states that recognize that for the purposes of redistricting, we should count prisoners at their homes instead of in their temporary residence during incarceration.

SB 331 is a well-considered bill which instructs the Department of Corrections and Secretary of State's office to work together to adjust the decennial federal Census populations by counting inmates in their district of origin.

The Supreme Court's decision in *Baker v. Carr* enshrined that each person is entitled to the same relative amount of representation, which means that legislative districts must be roughly equivalent in population. The entire exercise of redistricting is an attempt to reflect the equal value of each individual's voice by making sure that as population shifts that district boundaries respond accordingly to equalize the changes.

In Oregon, incarcerated individuals cannot vote and are concentrated into 15 facilities in 12 legislative districts. This non-voting population artificially inflates the relative strength of people living near the prison, while decreasing the relative strength of their community of origin.

SB 331 corrects this unintended imbalance by counting inmates at their homes instead of the facility in which they are assigned to serve their sentence.

The basis of our geographic system of representation is that there are indeed differences in the character and qualities of communities across the state. Senator Shields represents a different kind of Oregonian than Representative Bentz. Although Oregonians from all corners share a sense of wonder and appreciation for our great state, opinions differ on how fulfill Oregon's promise. There is a common thread running through community members who live together, raise their children together, and come together to solve problems. This is why we elect legislators from geographic districts, to reflect that communities deserve to have their unique voices heard. When members of some communities are counted arbitrarily in another area due to temporary incarceration, it erodes the sense of geographic representation so fundamental to our democracy.

SB 331 reflects best practice based on national research and would restore equity of representation to communities across the state.

We thank Sen. Shields for his leadership and the Rules Committee for considering this important issue and hope that you will agree that now is the time to make changes for fairness and justice leading up to the 2021 redistricting process. Passing SB 331 will be an important step towards that end and we encourage the Rules Committee to advance this bill.

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The City Club of Portland is a nonprofit, nonpartisan education and research based civic organization dedicated to community service, public affairs and leadership development. In 2011-12 we studied the redistricting process in Oregon and nationally and developed several ideas to improve our state's process.

The Redistricting Matters Coalition is a group of organizations that recognize the fundamental importance of the redistricting process and advocate reforms in Oregon. Learn more at: www.redistrictingmatters.org