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March 10, 2015

To: Oregon Senate Committee on Rules, Sen. Diane Rosenbaum, Chair  
From: Darlene Huntress, Executive Director, Oregon Action  
Re: Support for Senate Bill 331

Chair Rosenbaum, Vice Chair Ferrioli, and Members of the Senate Rules Committee,

My name is Darlene Huntress and I am the Executive Director of Oregon Action, a statewide, multi-racial and multi-ethnic community organization dedicated to social justice. Oregon Action assists people to organize on their own behalf – with a focus on low-income people, people of color and others with limited access to traditional structures of power and policy-making. It is on behalf of those communities that I am here today to voice our support for Senate Bill 331. Many have testified today about how Senate Bill 331 addresses the problems that arise when prisoners are counted as residents of where they are incarcerated rather than where they resided before their conviction. To be respectful of your time, and to give others an opportunity to speak, I would like to mention just one other aspect of this discussion that is especially important to the members of Oregon Action.

There are unintended political distortions that happen when relocating large numbers of urban, minority prisoners into mostly white, rural areas and then counting them as constituents there. The result is a shift in power between residents of prison districts and those who don't have non-voting prisoners swelling their numbers—and this shift is at the expense of very specific urban communities where most prisoners originate—largely Latino, African American, and/or low income. These are communities who already feel disempowered in the democratic process. Diluting their relative voting strength adds another item to a seemingly endless list of barriers, and only serves to further marginalize their voices from decision-making. SB 331 would address these unintended consequences by requiring the collection of home addresses of incarcerated people and correcting the Census' population data to reflect people at their home addresses for state, county and municipal redistricting purposes.

On behalf of Oregon Action, I thank you for considering SB 331 and urge you to vote this bill out of committee for consideration by your colleagues.

Darlene Huntress  
Executive Director, Oregon Action