



Oregon Secretary of State's Office

Testimony Supporting SB 861

All Oregonians should be proud that our state is leading the country in bipartisan improvements to ensure secure and accessible voting. The Secretary of State's office supports SB 861 because it continues this tradition and builds upon recent voting reforms.

Automatic Voter Registration has resulted in a significant increase in eligible voters who are registered to vote. Governor Brown worked hard to implement this program in a manner that is highly secure. In fact, many people are unaware that the Automatic Voter Registration program requires better citizenship verification than what is required for other forms of voter registration.

Secretary Richardson built on this success by protecting the rights of over 60,000 voters to receive a ballot instead of being moved to inactive status. He stepped up security by referring 54 cases of apparent illegal voting for criminal prosecution by the Attorney General. He also made Oregon the first state to use social media to communicate directly with inactive voters to encourage them to update their registration, and he made online voter registration mobile friendly and available in five new languages.

Oregon has taken a leadership role in the Electronic Registration Information Center, a non-profit membership organization of 25 blue, purple, and red states plus the District of Columbia with a mission to help state and local election officials improve the accuracy of their voter rolls, register more eligible citizens, reduce costs and improve the voting process.

It is now time to take the next step in Oregon's tradition of bipartisan increases in security and accessibility in elections. Recent registration improvements mean that Oregon's foremost challenge is now increasing turnout, particularly among nonaffiliated voters. SB 861 is one of four recommendations from the Secretary of State's office to increase turnout this session. First, we should move up the date of the 2020 primary election to March. Second, we should create a Nonaffiliated Primary. Third, we should allow minor parties to participate in the state primary election. Fourth, we should begin prepaid postage.

1. Currently, only a handful of states vote for president after Oregon's May primary. Notably, California just moved its primary to the first Tuesday in March. Moving our primary earlier could elevate Oregon's priorities in the national discussion, give Oregonians more access to presidential candidates, and increase voter turnout. Secretary Richardson introduced HB 2279 and others have introduced similar bills. The fiscal impact is minimal.

2. Although nearly one-third of Oregon voters are not affiliated with a political party, these nonaffiliated voters often feel left out of Oregon's primary elections. Secretary Richardson and Alan Zundel introduced SB 225 to create a Nonaffiliated Primary that allows nonaffiliated candidates to have ballot access and empowers nonaffiliated voters to have a larger voice in the primary. The fiscal impact is \$140,000.
3. Oregon laws impacting political parties currently are written in ways that benefit long-established major parties at the expense of smaller parties. Secretary Richardson introduced SB 226 to allow minor parties to participate in the state funded primary and make other changes to help level the playing field between large and small political parties in order to promote equity and encourage voter choice. The fiscal impact is \$140,000 per minor party that participates.
4. Many first-time and younger voters don't usually keep stamps in their home. Voters who live far from ballot drop boxes or who are experiencing disabilities effectively have a shorter window of time to vote, and not having to go out and buy a stamp can give them extra time to participate. A broad coalition introduced SB 861 to help increase participation. The fiscal impact is uncertain because we do not know future registration rates, turnout rates, and mailing rates with prepaid postage.

Many have inquired about the fiscal impact of implementing prepaid postage for the entire 2019-21 biennium. Taking the number of ballots returned during the regular elections in the 2017-19 biennium (we did not include the January 2018 special election), accounting for estimated increases in population and registration, as well as recent higher postage rates, we estimate costs of \$2,979,584 if 100% of voters *who return their ballots* do so by mail and \$1,523,812 if 50% of voters *who return their ballots* do so by mail. These estimates still need to be adjusted slightly higher for the 2019-21 biennium as they do not yet factor in the higher turnout of a presidential election or higher turnout resulting from prepaid postage.

In order to budget responsibly, we recommend that the legislature set aside the high-end estimate and then reimburse the Elections Division for actual receipts, allowing unspent monies to return to the General Fund. A similar approach was successfully used for funding of the January 2018 special election, and we returned \$284,588 unspent.

Some bills introduced this session claim to continue improving Oregon elections but in reality only bias the playing field or increase the power of favored special interest groups. SB 861 is not one of these bills. Instead, it is a bipartisan improvement with fair outcomes that also had bipartisan support when implemented in Washington. The Secretary of State's office urges your support of all four proposals to increase turnout.

Contact: Steve Elzinga 503-986-2259 or stephen.elzinga@oregon.gov