



## SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

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### **Oregon Voting Rights Act heads to Governor's desk**

*HB 3310: Removes barriers to election for members of protected classes*

SALEM – A bill that will give greater voice to underrepresented populations in local elections has advanced through the Oregon Senate today and will arrive at Gov. Kate Brown's desk for her signature.

The Oregon Voting Rights Act – [House Bill 3310](#) – passed the Senate today on a 28-0 vote. The bipartisan legislation – carried by Sen. Tim Knopp (R-Bend) – puts Oregon in line with the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by ensuring there is a local and community-driven process to ensure protected classes have equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice. The bill creates a path and cause of action for school districts, education service districts and community college districts to structure their boards so that minority populations in their communities are represented.

"I've served on a school district budget committee in my community, and I'm happy to see us move forward with this legislation to give voices to communities that have been disenfranchised and ignored," said Sen. James Manning (D-Eugene), a chief co-sponsor of the bill. "This is an important step forward for our state, as we're setting the table so we can have a more diverse groups of leaders across the state having input into how their communities' students are educated."

The Oregon Voting Rights Act prohibits district elections from impairing members of protected classes from having equal opportunities to elect candidates of their choice or having equal opportunity to influence election outcomes. Often, protected classes have their voices diluted

simply through the election process. One way that happens is by having district-wide at-large positions instead of having each board member represent a specific geographical segment of the community.

“The Oregon Voting Rights Act enshrines the spirit of the National Voting Rights in Oregon law by creating a community driving process for school districts, education service districts and community college boards to align electoral structures with the National Voting Rights Act,” said PCUN Political Director Martha Sonato testified. “We are enthusiastically supportive of continuing to build a democracy that is accessible and equitable to all, especially for communities who have often been marginalized.”

Voting rights are a bedrock principle of democracy, and as Oregon takes on new challenges, particularly in education, it is important that all communities are engaged in finding the best paths forward.

“I’m a firm believer that all politics is local. Communities are most directly impacted by the decisions made by their local leaders,” Knopp said. “That’s why this legislation is so important. It ensures local elected leaders will be selected in a fair and accurate way so that communities that have been historically underrepresented may have equitable input into local policy.”

The National Voting Rights Act sets a standard for how elections must be structured to ensure protected classes have an opportunity to elect candidates of their choice. The Oregon Voter Rights Act does not create new requirements beyond that or prescribe a solution. It provides an alternative to federal lawsuits and creates a more community-driven process to align electoral structures with the National Voting Rights Act.

“As a local school board member, myself, I have seen regularly the lack of diversity on the governing bodies that oversee how our students are educated,” said Sen. Rob Wagner (D-Lake Oswego), who was a chief co-sponsor of the bill. “This will allow more people of color and members of other underrepresented communities the ability to elect representation that will reflect their unique experiences and better represent them. Then, more people will have a voice in the process.”

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