



PRESS RELEASE

PINEROS Y CAMPESINOS UNIDOS DEL NOROESTE (PCUN)

For Immediate Release

March 4th, 2019

For More Information, Contact:

Martha Sonato, 541-399-9392

marthasonato@pcun.org

Communities of Color Advocate for a More Reflective Democracy

SALEM - On February 26th, 2019, Oregon's leading racial justice and civil rights organizations-PCUN (Oregon's Farmworker Union), Latino Network, ACLU of Oregon, APANO, and Northwest Health Foundation - filed an Oregon Voting Rights Act, that would enshrine the spirit of the Federal Voting Rights Act in Oregon law.

HB 3310, chief sponsored by Rep. Diego Hernandez (D-Portland), Senator Tim Knopp (R-Bend), Sen. Rob Wagner (D-Lake Oswego) and Sen. James Manning (D-Eugene), aims to ensure there is a local and community driven process to ensure protected classes have an equal opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice.

"This legislation makes our democracy stronger and more representative," Rep. Hernandez said. "We want to make sure education districts reflect the compact communities of interest and that our diverse electorate has an equal opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice."

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

"The Oregon Voting Rights Act would establish a process that ensures communities of color are heard, and represented," explained PCUN's Executive Director, Reyna Lopez. "Today, the most racially diverse communities are not represented demographically by their elected officials. We can change this, starting with our local school boards, Education Service Districts, and community colleges."

The National Voting Rights Act (NVRA) sets a standard for how elections must be structured to ensure protected classes have an opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice. The Oregon Voter Rights Act does *not* create any new requirements beyond the NVRA, or prescribe a solution on how local school board, community college board and education service district board elections should be held. It *does* provide an alternative to federal lawsuits. It creates a

more community driven process to align electoral structures with the National Voting Rights Act.

This bill comes out of work that was done in Washington following a lawsuit filed against the City of Yakima. The city council elected individuals to represent zones within the city, but each zone's representative was elected by the city at large. Citizens in Yakima filed a claim that their right to elect a candidate of their choice, guaranteed by the National Voting Rights Act was being violated by this electoral structure. The case went through the federal court system and eventually the Supreme Court, where the plaintiffs prevailed, and the city was required to change its electoral structure. The process was long and costly for all involved. Following this experience, Washington enacted the Washington Voter Rights Act, which creates an alternative to federal litigation in order to address electoral structures that are out of compliance with the National Voting Rights Act.

Enacting the Oregon Voting Rights Act will ensure that the voters rights are protected and that every Oregonian has the opportunity to have their voice heard in our elections.

####