

SHEMIA FAGAN

SECRETARY OF STATE

CHERYL MYERS

DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE

TRIBAL LIAISON



January 26, 2022

TO: President Peter Courtney, President Pro Tempore James I. Manning Jr., Speaker Paul Holvey, Speaker-Elect Dan Rayfield, Joint Interim Committee On Ways and Means

Re: Protect Our Democracy Agenda

Dear Legislators:

The 2022 Legislative Session comes amid a sustained attack on our most basic political right — the right to vote. Today I'm announcing my Protect Our Democracy Agenda, which includes measures to protect the administration of Oregon's elections.

Last year, 19 states passed laws that will make it harder for eligible voters to cast a ballot. More are expected to do so in 2022. Meanwhile, legislators in Georgia and elsewhere have passed laws that give partisan officials the ability to meddle in elections administration, and Federal oversight has been curtailed by the Supreme Court's decision to gut the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Of course, we can't forget the events of January 6, 2021, when a group of violent insurrectionists stormed the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to stop the certification of the 2020 Presidential Election.

In Oregon, public support for voting rights and strong local leadership puts us in a unique position to not just play defense in this area but to lead on pro-democracy reform. This year I'm calling on you to **modernize our elections systems**, begin to **right-size election administration**, **protect the local officials who run elections**, and **apply necessary technical fixes to election laws**.

Oregon is often called on to lead. We were the first state in the nation to implement vote-by-mail in the 1990s. In 2016 we became the first state to implement automatic voter registration at the DMV. Today our elections are the gold standard in safety, security and participation. So as the nation faces an unprecedented attack on voting rights, we are called to lead once again.

Please see the included Protect Our Democracy Agenda. For more information, contact Jessica Ventura, Legislative Director, jessica.ventura@sos.oregon.gov.

The Protect Our Democracy Agenda

- **Protect the people who protect our democracy (LC 286).** Since the 2020 election we've seen an unprecedented rise in threats against local elections officials around the country and right here in Oregon. Part of defending our democracy is protecting the dedicated professionals who administer elections in all 36 counties in Oregon. We need to establish penalties for the harassment of elections workers and exempt their private information, such as home address, from public records.
- **Modernize Oregon's voter registration and election management system.** Modernizing our decades old voter registration database system will help protect the integrity of our elections. The Secretary of State's Elections Division is seeking \$5,300,000 Federal Funds in a technical

limitation increase as part of the Oregon Votes project. Oregon Votes is a new, modern system for voter registration and election management, that will increase communication with voters, increase efficiency and uniformity across the state, and improve adherence to leading federal standards.

- **Begin to right-size our elections administration.** During the busiest elections season in history the Oregon Elections Division has operated without adequate staff, relying on overtime and other measures to meet the needs of the public. We are seeking an increase from the general fund to hire two key positions within the Division to begin to right-size our staff.
- **Apply necessary technical fixes for clarity in elections laws (SB 1527).** The Elections Division has identified needed technical fixes to several laws. These include changes to the timelines for notifying candidates of a recall or complaint, updating antiquated recall signature timelines, and updates to deadlines that were impacted by HB 3291, the Postmark Bill.

Additionally, I am giving my endorsement to two pieces of legislation that will help ensure every eligible voter can cast a ballot. HB 4133 will remove barriers to online voter registration for people without a driver's license and HB 4147 will restore voting rights to Oregonians — disproportionately Black and other people of color — disenfranchised because of incarceration.

In addition to the Protect Our Democracy Agenda, I am asking for your support on SB 1546, which would establish the Elliott State Research Authority, a public agency to oversee the Elliott State Research Forest in coordination with Oregon State University. As a member of the State Land Board, the Elliott State Research Forest is a priority.

This agenda will ensure that Oregon continues to lead on voting rights, moves forward with modernization of an elections system that centers efficiency and transparency, and that we play our part in the fight against anti-democratic attacks on our nation's elections.

Sincerely,



Shemia Fagan

Oregon Secretary of State