



New Rose City Resource Guide is on the streets July 27!

Accessing your vote!



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Old, new legislation may mean more access to voting in the State of Oregon

BY JAKE THOMAS CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Voter turnout in Oregon could see an increase among low-income individuals, students and others around the state. With less than 10,000 people registering to vote through public assistance agencies, lawmakers and advocates are pushing for change.

"The number of people registering at (social service) agencies have been dropping like stones," said Nicole Zeitler, director of public agency voter registration for Project Vote, a national organization that seeks to increase voting rates.

Lawmakers in Salem have quietly passed a bill this past legislative session that could result in a significant number of under-represented Oregonians being registered to vote.

With strong bi-partisan support, the

Oregon Legislature passed a bill signed by Governor John Kitzhaber that establishes a 10-member council charged with determining if the state is in compliance with a federal law that requires social service and other public agencies to offer clients the opportunity to register to vote when applying for benefits.

Specifically, the council - made up of the state election officials and other members appointed by the governor - will be looking at how well Oregon is complying with the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA), a Clinton-era law often referred to as the "motor-voter" act for its requirement that people be given the opportunity to register to vote at the Department of Motor Vehicles when getting their driver's license.

The NVRA also includes a lesser-known provision that mandates that any

applicant for public assistance (including food stamps, Medicaid, disability and child health care) or disability services be offered the opportunity to register to vote when applying for benefits. The same requirement goes for other federally funded agencies and institutions, including universities, veterans affairs and, interestingly, military recruitment.

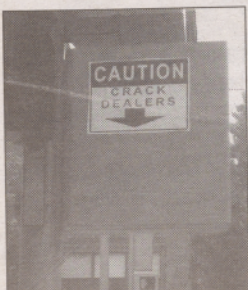
"However, this provision has been poorly upheld for years," said Zeitler. Although some early lawsuits established the constitutionality of the NVRA, Zeitler said that compliance with the law's provision that voter registration is offered at public assistance agencies has dropped off over the years due to a lack of institutional commitment from state governments.

Data from the U.S. Electoral

For more information on the Oregon Bus Project go to: www.busproject.org

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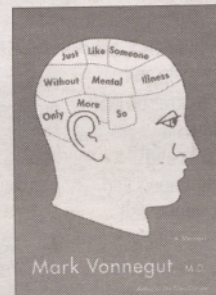
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