

In support of Measure 88: Give Oregonians equal rights

BY SHARON GARY-SMITH
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

At McKenzie River Foundation (MRG), we have never been shy about articulating our vision for a just and joyful Oregon. For nearly four decades, we've funded innovative grassroots groups advancing social, racial, economic, and environmental justice. We invest nearly half a million dollars each year in groups that are working on some of the most pressing issues facing Oregon communities.

This year, we've decided that there are times when we must also lend our voices and speak out in support of critical issues. Which is why I'm urging you to vote yes on Measure 88, the Safe Roads Act.

Since 2007, when Governor Kulongoski restricted driver licenses to only those who could provide proof of legal residence, MRG's grantees and allies have been working for a better system, developing the leadership of those most impacted, and building a powerful cross-sector coalition. In 2013, these groups secured a major victory when the Safe Roads Act passed the Oregon legislature with statewide, bipartisan support. The Act ensures that undocumented Oregonians, those experiencing homelessness, and others without documentation, can live their lives, get to work and go to school without fear of arrest or deportation.

Now, a small group of opponents is trying to dismantle that work by referring Measure 88 to the ballot. And we cannot allow their efforts to go unchallenged. We must vote yes on Measure 88 and guarantee access to Oregon roads for all Oregonians.

Voting YES on Measure 88 ensures that Oregon residents who can pass a driver's test will be able to get a driver's card, allowing them to safely and legally drive on Oregon roads. While this driver card is actually quite limited, it moves us ever closer to securing social justice for all Oregonians. We will only thrive when all of us have equal access to roads, education, services, and jobs – voting yes on Measure 88 is an important step in that direction.

From my position as the executive director of MRG Foundation, I have a somewhat unique opportunity to see across issues, across communities, and across the state. From Ashland to Scappoose and from Coos Bay to La Grande, MRG's grantees, donors, and leaders work in nearly every county and come from every movement. I see the ways that this measure will benefit not just undocumented immigrants, but also seniors and those affected by homelessness. It's clear to me that it will strengthen not just one social justice movement, but many; transportation is essential to employment, accessing healthcare, education, and much more. And being able to live without fear of

persecution or deportation is an essential building block for family security, equity, and justice. Voting yes on Measure 88 advances not one, but many causes. The measure supports not one, but many communities.

All of us must do what we can to stand up to those who would deny rights and access to all Oregonians. For me, and for MRG, that means supporting the Measure 88 campaign with both our voices and our resources. For others, it might mean knocking on doors or talking to neighbors. And others still might simply vote yes on the measure. But we can all contribute to this important effort.

This is an opportunity to build stronger coalitions and demand an Oregon where we can all get to work and school. It's an opportunity to lift our voices for friends and allies, to change a system that punishes people based on where they were born or where they live, and to take a crucial step toward a more just and joyful Oregon. We must seize this opportunity together.

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Sharon Gary-Smith is the Executive Director of the McKenzie River Gathering Foundation.

To find out more about the foundation visit www.mrgfoundation.org

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