



July 24, 2017

TO: Oregon Secretary of State Dennis Richardson and Oregon Deputy Secretary of State Leslie Cummings

FROM: The members of the Oregon Nurses Association

RE: Call for transparency in light of potential conflicts of interests related to Referendum 301

As nurses, we pledge to uphold a code of ethics that requires us to disclose any perceived or potential conflicts of interest and to recuse ourselves from our work if necessary. The Secretary of State should be held to the same standard.

During the 2017 legislative session, Oregon Senators and Representative worked together to successfully pass bipartisan legislation on the Healthcare Protections Bill to preserve health care for hundreds of thousands of Oregonians and reduce premium increases for hundreds of thousands more.

This was the result of months of good faith collaboration between legislators, hospitals, insurers, and health care organizations and was supported by legislators from both parties along with the Oregon Nurses Association, the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems, the Oregon Medical Association, Providence Health Systems, PeaceHealth, Legacy Health, Oregon Health & Science University, Asante, 15 coordinated care organizations, multiple insurance companies and many other health care groups.

Now there is a referendum circulating to cancel the Healthcare Protections bill that is being led by the paid political consultant for the Oregon Secretary of State. This unprecedented situation has lead us to take an unprecedented action.

With so much at stake for our patients as well as the integrity of Oregon's electoral system, we respectfully request Secretary Richardson and his executive team act immediately to develop a full transparency policy regarding his communications with Representative Julie Parrish that includes all matters relating to Senate Bill 229 and Referendum 301 to ensure that all matters are handled with an impartiality and in the full view of Oregon voters.

#### **BACKGROUND: POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

State Representative Julie Parrish is the chief petitioner of a referendum (Referendum 301) that aims to reverse the progress Oregon made to preserve the health care services hundreds of

thousands of Oregonians rely on. As you know, the Secretary of State's office is responsible for overseeing this referendum process.

Representative Parrish has a long personal and financial history with Secretary Richardson that casts doubt on the Secretary's ability to be a fair election arbiter and fulfill fair and impartial implementation of the Secretary of State's duties.

Specifically concerning is the fact that Secretary Richardson has paid Representative Parrish's political consulting firm nearly \$330,000 during his political campaign and he is currently paying her firm a \$1,000 monthly retainer for political consulting services. Furthermore, Representative Parrish's firm has also donated more than \$20,000 to Secretary Richardson through campaign contributions. [These transactions are documented in the attached addendum.](#)

It is unusual and possibly unprecedented for a sitting Secretary of State and a state legislator who is also a political consultant and chief petitioner of a referendum which the Secretary will oversee to have significant financial ties. This combination of personal, political and financial connections poses a potential conflict of interest that the Secretary of State's office must immediately address.

For example, recently, Richardson and Parrish released individual statements regarding Senate Bill 229 that appear to be aligned. Both statements discussed the cost of the election, holiday interruptions, voter turnout, and partisans engaged in the ballot title process. Secretary Richardson and Representative Parrish were some of the only elected officials to speak out against Senate Bill 229. [Their statements are included in the attached addendum.](#)

Of additional concern are potential conflicts of interest between Secretary of State Richardson's former communications director, Michael Calcagno with Representative Parrish and the referendum campaign. Calcagno has received \$1,105 in compensation to date from the political action committee behind Referendum 301 for production of advertising.

Additionally, the top contributor to the political action committee behind Referendum 301, Brian Maguire, contributed \$10,000 to date to this effort. Mr. Maguire also contributed \$16,000 to Secretary Richardson's candidate committee – the same committee that funds Rep. Parrish's political position - and another \$10,000 to Representative Parrish's candidate committee.

#### ENSURING THE INTEGRITY OF THE PROCESS

Our elections are only as strong as the administrators who run them, and voter confidence in our elections is more important than ever before.

To ensure confidence in Secretary Richardson's work on this issue, we request he and his office develop a full transparency policy in regards to communications between Secretary Richardson and Representative Parrish on all matters relating to Senate Bill 229 and Referendum 301. This transparency is necessary to reassure Oregonians that the Secretary of State's office and Secretary Richardson are working in the interest of the Oregonians he was elected to serve and are not influenced by ongoing relationships between the Secretary of State and the referendum

chief petitioner. Taking steps towards full transparency is crucial to avoid further perceived conflicts of interest that undermine voter confidence in our electoral system.

The public should have the opportunity to review these documents in detail. We further recommend that the Secretary of State should recuse himself from his involvement with Referendum 301 and allow impartial elections officers to oversee this process.

To be fully transparent, the Secretary of State's office should take immediate action and post online any documents generated by the SOS office that include, but are not limited to:

- Rulemaking to implement Senate Bill 229
- Public statements regarding Senate Bill 229
- Deadlines and form submissions for Referendum 301 and the Special Election it may trigger in 2018
- Submission of ballot title comments for Referendum 301
- Public statements regarding Referendum 301
- Signature observation and verification for Referendum 301
- Advice regarding signature collection for Referendum 301

The office should also include full and immediate disclosure of any communication regarding Referendum 301 from chief petitioners, staff, consultants and the Secretary of State for:

- Call logs
- Text messages
- Emails
- Memos and other written communication
- Face-to-face meetings with chief petitioners
- Complaints
- All other related contact

Oregonians' confidence in our elections and our election officers is fundamental to a functioning democracy. We urge the Secretary of State's office to begin taking steps to improve transparency in the election process involving Referendum 301 and begin to restore Oregonians' confidence in our election system.