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On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Rules

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SJR1

Although I agree Oregon needs tax reform and that retirees struggle to pay property taxes in Oregon, this is not the best approach to provide tax relief.

First, this resolution provides tax relief to wealthy seniors who can afford to pay. When I lived in San Francisco, I personally experienced the tax inequality created by Proposition 13 creating a generational barrier for young people to acquire property. Even if there was an income verification process, many seniors engage in artificial impoverishment.

I note that seniors disproportionately vote - and this means when voting on tax proposals they may favor taxes that significantly hurt their neighbor but from which they are relatively immune.

Next, verifying owner occupation opens up the system to fraud, as families can title swap. County assessors have limited means to verify owner occupation short of intrusive surveillance. San Francisco has a highly problematic senior exemption to school parcel taxes, and that program has been notoriously open to abuse.

Finally, this resolution fails to account for seniors who may still own property but require assisted living and are no longer the occupants of property they hope to leave to their family. Keeping granny in the house in order to afford the taxes opens the system to elder abuse.

If the legislature truly wanted to pursue tax relief benefitting seniors, it would reinstate the double majority rule for tax increases, eliminate unnecessary programs in order to reduce taxes, and consider replacing property taxes with a land-value tax.