

Multnomah County Charter Review Committee
Equitable Representation Subcommittee
Multimember district proposal 1-pager

Proposal: Increase representation in County districts from 1 member per district to 3 members per district.

- No changes to county-wide election of county chair or powers of county chair
- No changes to district boundaries
- Necessitates some changes to election timing to implement.
- Necessitates proportional representation to achieve intended policy outcomes
- Increases county council from 5 seats to 13 seats (3 seats x 4 districts + 1 chair)
- To achieve proportionality, all 3 seats from each district would be voted on at the same time.

Implementation: In Nov 2024, Districts 1,3, and 4 would each elect three representatives. Also in Nov 2024, District 2 would elect two representatives to serve a special 2-year term. In Nov 2026, the Chair and all three District 2 representatives would be up for election.

Why?

- Representation ratio is currently too high compared to comparably sized jurisdictions. Multnomah County's population is 824,204; with 5 Commissioners, this is 1 rep per 164,800 residents. With this change to multi member districts, there would be approximately one representative per 68,683 residents, a number in line with most other major cities and counties.

For reference:

1 state rep per 70,620 Oregonians (60 reps in state house)
1 state senator per 141,241 Oregonians (30 senators in state senate)
U.S. Congressional rep is 1 per 700,000 Oregonians

- In the Portland region, so much of regional decisions are made from unelected or appointed bodies. For example, the governing boards of TriMet, Port of Portland, and the Oregon Dept of Transportation are all appointed by the governor. In a region with over a million residents, voters are only able to vote for 2 county commissioners (1 district and 1 at-large), 5 at-large city commissioners, and 2 people on Metro (1 district and 1 at-large). Given the size, scope, and budget of Multnomah County, there needs to be more opportunities for more voices to influence the County's direction.
- Concentration of power in the hands of a few people is a relic of white supremacy culture.
- Increasing council size is a way to increase representation, electoral power, and access for people of color.

- Local government is a gateway and a stepping stone to get started in politics. If people from underrepresented groups do not feel like they can run for local government, they won't get involved in running for state or federal offices.
- Multimember districts improve access for new candidates and reduce barriers to entry by reducing the number of votes needed to win. Instead of needing to win 100,001 votes (half of 200,000 residents in a district, a candidate only needs to win 50,001 votes to attain political office (1/4th of 200,000).
- Multimember districts, when combined with proportional representation, are a key strategy for improving the likelihood of people of color being able to elect a candidate of choice.
- According to a detailed Multnomah County-specific analysis by More Equitable Democracy, most of the gains from multimember districts are realized even if district boundaries remain unchanged.
- For a three seat district, 25% + 1 vote is enough to guarantee a candidate of choice for people of color gets elected. Based on the citizen voting age population (CVAP), voters of color have electoral power to elect 1 candidate of choice in 3 of 4 county districts.
- To achieve intended policy outcomes of increasing electoral power for voters of color, multimember districts must be paired with some form of proportional representation.