



March 14, 2019

Dear Senator Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher and Judiciary Committee Members,

The Rural Organizing Project is a non-profit organization supporting a network of over sixty groups in rural counties and the small towns of Oregon in 31 of Oregon's 36 counties. We are writing in support of Senate Bill 577. In our twenty-six years of work in Oregon we have encountered many instances of hate and harassment directed at vulnerable communities and community members because of their race, religion, sexual orientation, gender or gender expression. Often when people who live in small towns are targeted and harassed or physically assaulted, they feel they have no place to go for help. Either there is no local law enforcement and the state police or county sheriff are too far away to reach them in a timely way, or they feel that those bodies will be unresponsive or unsupportive in their situation. We are often on the receiving end of calls from them, their friends or family members asking for help and support.

When we have tried to find out how common some of these crimes are, so that we can see the patterns or learn more about who is perpetrating them or how the local authorities are responding, those statistics are unavailable. We have seen victimized people left to fend for themselves with very little support from the justice system and left to worry about whether they will be even more vulnerable if they report what has happened to them.

We believe Senate Bill 577 is a huge step towards a unified system of reporting instances of bias crime statewide, including in smaller jurisdictions. We are glad to see gender and sexual orientation added as protected classes in this legislation. That is a long overdue addition. We also see that the bill will provide a way for survivors to report crimes to someone outside of their local area if they don't feel comfortable or safe reporting to local authorities and that it will create a system that is more victim focused with a set of services to support and care for victims beyond just deciding whether a case can be prosecuted or not. In general, we see this bill as providing an update to a woefully out of date bill. That 1980s bill was in response to a specific problem with "skinheads" and we now unfortunately face a more diversified set of bias activities around the state – some perpetrated by individual actors, some by small groups, some planned and carried out by organized hate groups. We think SB 577 can help prosecute these crimes, track what is going on and help us build an Oregon where these crimes are not a common occurrence.

Thank you very much for the work of your committee on this bill. We hope that you will pass it unanimously to the full Oregon Senate and advocate strongly for its passage.

Sincerely,  
Jessica Campbell and Cara Shufelt  
Co-Directors Rural Organizing Project

PO Box 664  
Cottage Grove, OR 97424  
503-543-8417  
office@rop.org