

To: The Honorable Jennifer Williamson, Chair; The Honorable Chris Gorsek, Vice-Chair; The Honorable Sherrie Sprenger, Vice-Chair; Members of the House Judiciary Committee

From: Carol Scherer

Re: Support for district attorney accountability: HB 3224

Chair Williamson, Vice Chairs Sprenger and Gorsek, and members of the House Judiciary Committee:

The Oregon criminal justice system is viewed negatively by an overwhelming percent of residents and with good reason. There is a profound lack of accountability and transparency at the highest level that sets a bad example for the system as a whole and is a major cause for the negative public perception. Although accountability and transparency requirements are placed on other law enforcement agencies, District Attorneys and staff, the most powerful actors in our criminal justice system, operate mostly in the dark. If DA's operate in the dark, what is the motivation for the rest of the criminal justice system to perform honorably and judiciously?

It is time for the Oregon Legislature to act prudently and pass HB 3224. We must ensure that District Attorneys throughout Oregon focus on keeping communities safe in an effective and fair manner. There should not be some "dark enforcement counties" and some that are transparent. This is especially important regarding law enforcement. There should be trust and consistency throughout the State in order to build a cohesive, compassionate Oregon community. Residents must be confident the criminal justice system operates fairly throughout Oregon.

We deserve to know if policies are having positive or negative impacts on our Oregon communities. Do policies support our values? Do policies support diversity and equity? Are taxpayers receiving good value for the taxes we pay? Are criminal justice policies resulting in wise use of resources? Do policies provide safety benefits in a cost effective way?

Oregon has one of the fastest growing prison populations in the nation and counties are continuing to request more funds for police and jails. This cycle is increasingly negative and harmful, both financially and socially. Without transparency, we will continue to not have information to build a more just community. Without accountability, residents will continue to have an overwhelmingly negative view of our criminal justice system. Without transparency and accountability, taxpayers cannot have confidence there is a prudent use of their money.

As a voter in Oregon, I ask that you pass Oregon House Bill 3224. Thank you. We the people deserve no less.

Sincerely,
Carol Scherer
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