

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: Stephen Dear

Re: Support for district attorney accountability: HB 3224

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

"A system that will take life must first give justice."

When then-ABA president John J. Curtin, Jr. testified before Congress with those words he was discussing the death penalty. But he was also talking about prosecutors' work practices and policies. Local district attorneys are some of the few most powerful people in our country. In a sense, their power is the most far-reaching we citizens allow for our government officials just short of the power to send men and women to kill and be killed in war. District attorneys have the power to prosecute for death, for sending juveniles to adult court and prisons, for pressuring innocent people to plead guilty.

As executive director of People of Faith Against the Death Penalty, a national nonprofit organization, for two decades, I have witnessed the tragic results of prosecutors being able to send people to death row wrongfully. Too often prosecutions are more about winning than justice and the truth.

Yet we know so little about what DAs do and why they do it. It's all a big mystery. We don't know their policies and procedures. They do not have to tell us. This situation must change. It's 2019. Accountability and transparency are paramount for our court system, especially our prosecutors.

So, I support HB 3224 because it requires district attorney offices to develop key policies and make them available to the public. Basic stuff. Common sense. And desperately needed in an open, civil society.

A system that incarcerates more people than any other country in the world must first be held accountable. Oregon needs to step up. Please support HB 3224. Give justice.

Sincerely,

Stephen Dear

Elmira, OR