

From the Desk of  
Senator  
Low Frederick

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## Organizations Representing Vulnerable Communities Request Support for SB 577

Dear Members of the Oregon Senate,

Oregon's reputation as a welcoming, inclusive place is at risk. Hate crimes are on the rise across the United States, and Oregon has seen a disturbingly rapid increase in bias incidents in our state. Our existing state laws are woefully out-of-date, and inadequate to the task of addressing this crisis. We are writing on behalf of the undersigned organizations and the communities we represent the request that the Legislature support Senate Bill 577, a critical piece of legislation which would modernize Oregon's hate crimes law.

Our organizations serve and are led by people of color, immigrants and refugees, LGBTQ Oregonians, rural communities, and people experiencing poverty. We work individually and collaboratively to build a unified intercultural movement for justice. Over the past 3 years, many of our members have spoken powerfully about the rising tide of hate crimes and bias incidents they are facing. Data from the FBI bear out what our community is telling us. According to FBI analysts, the number of hate crimes in the US rose about 5% between 2015 and 2016; in Oregon, however, the increase was 60%. **We're ashamed to say that we are one of the national hotspots for hate crimes and bias incidents. There is a crisis of hate in Oregon, and we must confront it.**

Unfortunately, our existing hate crimes law was written in 1981, and it hasn't been revised since then. A tool from 38 years ago is not well-equipped to deal with the way hate plays out in 2019. That's where SB 577 comes in: the bill will modernize our hate crimes law by clearly renaming them "bias crimes," and ensure that hate crimes are charged based on the harm to victims rather than the number of perpetrators. The bill will also require the state's Criminal Justice Commission to release data and reports about bias incidents, which in turn helps our community and law enforcement agencies to understand where, when, and how bias incidents are happening. And finally, it gives the Department of Justice the ability to address bias incidents which do not rise to the formal level of hate crimes.

SB 577 is an example of the best kind of consensus-based public process which engages as many stakeholders as possible. The bill emerged from Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum's Hate Crimes Task Force, which included representatives from community organizations like ours, civil rights advocates, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and law enforcement agencies. **That Task Force was unanimous in supporting the recommendations contained in SB 577, which is no small feat on an issue this important, and with a group of stakeholders this diverse.**

Failing to pass SB 577 would be devastating for the communities we work with and serve. We are ashamed to say that Oregon is now widely recognized as a national hot-spot for hate crimes. If we don't take action, we reinforce that narrative, sending a message that, if you are Black, Muslim, Jewish, queer, trans, or from any other impacted community, you are not welcome in Oregon. It will be a field day for hate groups, as they see Oregon's Legislature refuse to take action to combat their bigotry and violence. If we let SB 577 die this session, we will be turning our backs on Oregon's legacy as a welcoming, equitable, inclusive state for all. After passing the Senate Judiciary Committee with unanimous support, SB 577 was referred to Ways and Means due to its fiscal impact. The Department of Justice estimates that SB 577 would cost no more than

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\$721,000 to fully implement in the 2021-23 biennium, or just over \$360,000 per year. That's just 0.001% - *one thousandth of one percent* - of the total state budget. We believe, as do our 13,000 members and supporters, that this is a very small price to pay for the safety and security of vulnerable communities. Speaking on a personal level as taxpayers, this is exactly where we want the state to be spending its funds.

We must stem the tide of hate crimes and bias incidents in Oregon, and we must do it now. There is a crisis in this state, our communities are suffering, and Oregon's reputation as an open, welcoming place for all is at risk. Let's take the opportunity in front of us to come together and change that. **We ask that you support SB 577.**

Thank you for your consideration,

