




OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon

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To whom it may concern,

I write today on behalf of the Board, staff, and membership of OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon to support the passage of HB 4097. This is an important step toward prioritizing the safety of communities of color on public transportation. Police officers should not be in the business of inspecting transit fares.

Founded in 2006 by and for people of color and low income, OPAL is the grassroots-driven hub at the center of Oregon's movement for Environmental Justice. We develop community members' leadership skills, and motivate them to take action. Together, we lead campaigns, impact public processes, and win victories in policy and procedure to achieve a safe and healthy environment where we live, work, learn, play, and pray. We have a 14-year history of making change at all levels of decision-making, from neighborhood-scale improvements to Federal policy shifts. OPAL has a long history of organizing the bus riding public, youth of color, and other groups historically excluded from the decision-making that impacts their lives. We are in touch with the people who use public transit. We board buses and trains and talk to those who depend upon the system about how well it is serving them.

A policy of sweeping fare enforcement searches violates the constitutional rights of transit riders. This practice exacerbates disparities in the criminal justice system and contributes to the over-policing and over-prosecution of people of color, people with disabilities, and people experiencing homelessness and other forms of economic insecurity. We would never support policies which gave law enforcement the right to "stop and frisk" transit riders, or to arbitrarily request proof of immigration status, "show me your papers," yet giving the power to inspect for transit fare to police has identical impact to these injustices.

The issue at hand is a basic question of priority. Police officers are supposed to protect and serve the public. Yet police officers in cities with public transit are also allowed under current law to inspect for transit fares. This enforcement is unevenly targeted at low income riders, youth, and Black and Brown people. We know this because of Bus Riders Unite, the OPAL membership base which has consistently reported police profiling on public transit as an issue worthy of consideration and public policy change.

HB 4097 removes fare enforcement from the long list of expectations of law enforcement officers. This secures our transit system by enabling police to focus on violent crimes, and secures ridership by ensuring that profiling by law enforcement is diminished. We ask you to join us, and with the growing ranks of the transportation justice advocacy community, in supporting passage of HB 4097.

Sincerely,

Huy Ong, Executive Director

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