



March 16th, 2021

House Judiciary Subcommittee on Civil Law
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 2482: Equitable Transit Access

Chair Power, Vice-Chair Wallan, and members of the subcommittee,

My name is Andrea Valderrama and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon (ACLU of Oregon). We are a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of civil liberties and civil rights, with more than 28,415 members statewide. The ACLU of Oregon strongly supports HB 2482 in partnership with OPAL and our coalition partners.

Nobody should face arrest or jail time for not being able to afford a fare. The punishment simply does not fit the offense, and enforcement of this offense has disproportionately impacted Black Oregonians and poor Oregonians. These same communities have identified that the presence of police on public transit creates a lack of feeling of safety while riding. Public safety should be designed with the safety of *all* Oregonians in mind. Decoupling police from public transportation is an essential step in building an inclusive public safety system.

In passing HB 2482, Oregon would join jurisdictions throughout the country who are engaging in this best practice of decriminalizing fare evasion. The National Association of City Transportation Officials, whose mission is to “build cities with places for people, with safe, sustainable, accessible and equitable transportation” has publicly opposed criminal enforcement of fare evasion.¹ Additionally, an estimated 100 cities around the world offer free public transit,

¹“For transit agencies, whose mission should be to help people access their city, punitive approaches to fare collection don’t make sense,” said Alex Engel of the National Association of City Transportation Officials. ‘A sensitive, sensible approach to inspection is key to creating an equitable system,’ ... ‘Transit systems can train and deploy proof-of payment fare inspectors to ensure consistent inspection across routes and time of day. Fairness and the safety of both inspectors and riders is paramount; criminalizing riders will not result in an equitable transit system.’” found at <https://usa.streetsblog.org/2017/03/08/why-cities-are-starting-to-decriminalize-fare-evasion/>.



including Corvallis, OR and Olympia, WA.² After just one month of free ridership, Olympia saw a 20% ridership increase.³

Decriminalizing public safety is also cost-effective. While a single fare rarely exceeds a few dollars, the public financial burden of arrest, jailing, criminal defense and/or prosecution is a severely disproportionate public expenditure when compared to the potential public revenue lost by a single fare. In a moment where state budget constraints and consumer burdens are exacerbated by an unprecedented global pandemic, this policy change just makes sense.

HB 2482 is a smart, sensible, and necessary public safety and economic policy change, and the ACLU of Oregon urges your support.

Thank you,

Andrea Valderrama, Policy Director
ACLU of Oregon

² Abigail Johnson Hess, "Americans spend over 15% of their budgets on transportation costs--these US cities are trying to make it free," CNBC (Mar 2, 2020), <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/02/free-public-transportation-is-a-reality-in-100-citiesheres-why.html>.

³ *Id.*