



March 18, 2021

To: The House Committee on Judiciary

From: Michele Ruffin, Oregon Political Director, Forward Together Action

Re: Support of HB 2169

Dear Chair Bynum, Vice Chairs Noble and Power, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Michele Ruffin and I am the Oregon political director of Forward Together Action, a multi-issue organization working with Black, Indigenous, Women of Color and Non-Binary people to push for the systems change we need for all families to thrive. I'm write to you today on behalf of our organization's full support of HB 2169, because we believe in Justice for All.

HB 2169 addresses institutional racism through greater use of restorative justice practices, reduction of unnecessary deportations and family separation, and increased police accountability. These policies are a direct response to the long overdue national and local uprising for racial justice sparked by the death of George Floyd in 2020.

Last year, in the wake of the summer uprisings, Forward Together Action joined our national and local partners in calls for a stop to violence against Black communities and a demand for police accountability. Our team members supported mutual aid efforts, peaceful protests and wrote letters to cities we organize in. We are supportive of key elements in this bill that would move us forward toward a better future--- things such as the following:



- **Expand police oversight:** Authorize the creation of a police oversight agency or board by city and county governments
- **Improve transparency:** Improve public access to personnel files for police officers who have been investigated for misconduct
- **Require police identification:** Require law enforcement officers to inform a stopped person of reason for the stop and that they have the right to refuse a request to search.
- **Ensure informed police searches:** Require law enforcement officers to provide name and badge number if the stop doesn't result in an arrest or citation.

We've heard the stories of community members stopped by the police and encountered things such as use of force or unwarranted searches all without the officer identifying themselves--- we believe simple actions of reform such as requiring police identification and informed right to refuse, are part of the accountability needed in interactions with police.

According to the Open Policing Project done by Stanford University, Black and Latino drivers and pedestrians are searched more often and arrested at higher rates than white people, even in cases where officers have little to no evidence or suspicion of a crime.<sup>1</sup> Black Americans are five times more likely to be pulled over in a vehicle, even though white Americans are three times more likely to have contraband than people of color. Profiling leads to disproportionate arrests and conviction rates among communities of color.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://openpolicing.stanford.edu/findings/>



These stories are not unique to Oregon and are not unique to this time--- they have happened for years and given the moment we are in, the time has never been more critical to take steps in accountability for police.

Racial inequality in our public safety system has been hollowing out entire communities and creating generational trauma for too long. HB 2169 is an opportunity to make all of us safer by centering those who are most harmed by our criminal justice system.

I urge you to support and pass HB 2169, and thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Michele Ruffin

Oregon Political Director

Forward Together Action