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TO: Senate Committee on Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110  
FROM: Taylor Steenblock, Multnomah County Government Relations  
RE: SB 398  
DATE: March 2, 2021

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, Members of the Committee:

We at Multnomah County have taken an active stance against white supremacy, systemic racism and public displays of such behavior. Being antiracist means actively opposing and eradicating politics and practices that are racist or have racist outcomes. These policies and practices have long made our communities of color feel victimized, discriminated against and oppressed and must be stopped. One such practice is the displaying of a noose. There is a long, violent history associated with the display of a noose and its invocation of lynching.

As the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) describes, the noose “depicts the horrors of racial violence perpetrated against African Americans and others...Nooses show support for the days of segregation and subjugation, epitomizing the essence of discrimination. The noose not only symbolizes racism, but also served as the actual murder implement for the lynching of people because of the color of their skin.”

Across the nation and in Oregon, a surge in hate crimes over recent years has been documented by the SPLC as well as through mainstream and social media. The Oregonian published an article last year covering the hanging of a noose in a construction site in Portland and detailing several incidents involving the use of nooses. Multiple states, including New York, Connecticut, Maryland, Virginia, California, Louisiana, and the District of Columbia have already banned the display of a noose. Further, the Oregon Department of Education enacted a ban in September 2020 on hate symbols in public schools, including nooses.

We proudly support SB 398, which establishes the crime of intimidation by the display of a noose as a Class A misdemeanor. The bill is modeled after other state laws that have withstood court challenges on First Amendment grounds. Further, while not amending the existing bias crime statutes, the penalty in the bill parallels the penalty for a second-degree bias crime. We know this is only one step of many we must take for a more just and emancipatory society, but we believe it is a step in the right direction.

Thank you,

**Taylor Steenblock**  
Multnomah County Government Relations