

Dear Senator Wagner,

February 4, 2024

My name is BJ Park and I am a resident of Tualatin and one of your constituents. I know the Oregon Senate is contemplating confirmation on a nominee for a Parole Board member named Don Rees. I am familiar with Rees due to the fact that I worked as a Deputy District Attorney for almost five years from 2017 through 2022 in Multnomah County. Rees was the Chief Deputy District Attorney and I worked in his unit for most of the time I worked at that office. I am writing to make sure you have all the relevant information as you assess his candidacy.

I have been a prosecutor for the last 24 years and am currently a Deputy District Attorney for Marion County. I also worked at Oregon DOJ for five years as well as in Chicago for about 15 years, both in my capacity as a prosecutor. When I began at the Multnomah County DA's Office, I started as a lateral hire in what's known as Unit D which is the violent crimes unit. I handled homicides, sex assaults of adult and child victims, Measure 11 offenses, beatings, shootings, weapons offenses, internet crimes against children, child pornography cases, and bias crimes.

A member of the parole board needs to have an impeccable character and judgment due to their tremendous responsibility and power. Part of that character and judgment requires treating every person and every case equally and on their merits. The parole board's [own mission statement](#) talks about treating "all people with dignity and respect" no matter what the person's race or other characteristics. In my experience and opinion, Rees falls far short of these critical traits by treating people and cases unequally on many different levels. For example, Rees treated cases differently depending on who the defense attorney was rather than its merits. Rees also has given favors to those who Rees considers loyal to him rather than treat everyone on their merits and experience. Rees' uneven decisions resulted in the inequitable mess and chaos that has been occurring at the Multnomah County DA's Office. This has resulted in [unprecedented number](#) of deputy district attorneys [leaving that office](#), most of whom were [experienced veterans](#) such as myself in the past few years during the Mike Schmidt era. This exodus continues to occur today.

Rees also treated certain victims of crime unequally. This was particularly glaring when it came to victims from marginalized communities. Such persons are among the most vulnerable and most victimized in our community, as well as the most underreported. This is the reason why I was and continue to be a passionate advocate of bias crimes during my time at Multnomah, as I handled the majority of these cases. These victims were attacked and threatened simply for existing as who they were. When I was working under Rees, he was in charge of all the bias crime cases and he exhibited great indifference in regard to these cases on many levels. I left Multnomah County in part due to that apathy.

After I left, the bias crimes cases stumbled and faltered under Rees' leadership due to his inaction, apathy, and indifference. Some of these results of his neglect are detailed in the following article in the Oregonian from October of 2023.

<https://www.oregonlive.com/news/2023/08/spat-on-beaten-and-subjected-to-slurs-portlanders-devastated-their-tormentors-werent-prosecuted.html>

This article showed how Rees, and his boss Mike Schmidt, tolerated and allowed this level of apathy and rotting of these important cases on a large scale. Oregonians deserve better.

This shows a complete lack of sensitivity to the inequities of minorities in the criminal justice system. For example, according to [studies by Vera Institute of Justice](#) and reported by [Willamette Week](#), there were 307 white people imprisoned per 100,000 population in Oregon. However, the same number for Black people are 1,126 Black people imprisoned per 100,000 population in Oregon. This is 3.7 times more than their white counterparts, not to mention other people of color. He should not be entrusted with such responsibility over this population considering his insensitivity in regard to Oregon's marginalized communities.

There are many other examples and cases of Rees' unequal treatment of cases and people as well as his poor judgment, including consistently overcharging murder cases with its consequences. I am happy to expand on this with greater details if the Senate is interested. Please consider all of this evidence. I am available for any questions or clarifications regarding this matter. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

BJ Park