

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

My name is Elizabeth Nye, and I am the Executive Director of Lan Su Chinese Garden in Portland, Oregon. We are proud members of the Oregon Coalition for Nonprofit Safety, and I am here to express our strong support for SB 939.

At Lan Su Chinese Garden, our mission is to cultivate an oasis of tranquility and cultural exchange, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture. We strive to create a space that welcomes all people to experience the beauty, wisdom, and harmony embedded in classical Chinese garden design. However, recent acts of violence and vandalism have directly undermined this mission, violating the very essence of what we stand for.

In August 2023, our teahouse window was shattered by a slab of granite, which appeared to have been intentionally broken off from one of the bronze guardian lion statues at the entrance to Portland's Old Town/Chinatown. This act of vandalism occurred just before our annual Chinese Festival, a time meant for cultural celebration and unity. We viewed this as an act of hate targeting the Chinese community, and it deeply affected our staff and visitors.

Almost exactly a year later, in August 2024, we faced another distressing incident when an axe was hurled through our teahouse window in the middle of the night. Around the same time, someone smeared human feces on our exterior walls. These acts of hate have created an atmosphere of fear and anxiety among our staff, visitors, and members.

Lan Su was designed to be a sanctuary—and when acts of violence penetrate its walls, they shatter the sense of safety that is fundamental to our mission.

The impact on our community has been profound. We have deployed an increasing share of our already limited resources to figure out how to keep our staff, visitors, and members safe, including security training to enhanced surveillance and physical barriers. We have been forced to divert funds away from our core mission to address these ongoing threats. Yet, despite these measures, our staff—who come to work each day in a beautiful garden—are still afraid. Just in September, following the most recent attack, three staff members resigned due to stress.

We also hear directly from our visitors, who tell us they are afraid to come to the garden. Elderly community members now hesitate to visit. Parents worry about bringing their children.

In response to these ongoing threats, we were compelled to erect a chain-link fence around the garden in August 2024. While this measure was necessary, it stands in stark contrast to

our mission of providing an open and welcoming space for cultural exchange and reflection. Lan Su was never meant to be enclosed by barriers, but rather to be a bridge between cultures and communities. Our work contributes significantly to the broader community's well-being by fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. When violence and intimidation make our space unsafe, it does more than harm a garden—it threatens an entire community's ability to connect, learn, and feel a sense of belonging.

Beyond the direct impact on our organization, there is a broader message being sent when an institution of Lan Su's size and cultural significance becomes the target of hate and violence. It sends a chilling signal to all small businesses, cultural organizations, and nonprofits in our community. These attacks do not exist in a vacuum—they contribute to a growing climate of fear that ripples outward, affecting countless other organizations and businesses that are integral to the fabric of our city.

We stand in solidarity with organizations of diverse missions, cultures, and beliefs, united in the conviction that everyone in Oregon should be able to exercise their rights free from violence and intimidation, and to do so safely.

Part of why we support this legislation is that it provides access to resources that otherwise might not be available due to more narrowly defined criteria. Many existing funding opportunities for security enhancements come with rigid guidelines that do not always align with the unique needs of cultural institutions like Lan Su. SB 939 ensures that organizations facing real threats, including those that may not fit traditional definitions of religious or high-risk institutions—can still access the resources necessary to protect their staff, visitors, and mission. This flexibility is crucial in addressing the growing safety concerns across Oregon's diverse nonprofit community.

Current resources are insufficient to meet the security needs of Oregon's nonprofit community. The risks we face are real and pressing, and we urgently need your support. We respectfully ask you to support SB 939 and join other states in establishing a state-funded nonprofit security grant program.

Thank you for your attention to this critical legislation.

Elizabeth Nye

Executive Director, Lan Su Chinese Garden

38 NW Davis St #260, Portland, OR 97209

Phone: 503.228.8131

Email: info@lansugarden.org