



CITY OF PORTLAND, OREGON



Bureau of Police

Keith Wilson, Mayor
Robert Day, Chief of Police

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March 31, 2025

Senate Committee on Judiciary
Oregon State Capitol Building
900 Court Street NE, Hearing Room E
Salem, OR 97301

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

On behalf of the Portland Police Bureau, I am writing to express our support for Senate Bill 238-1, which expands permissible law enforcement uses of Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) technology and streamlines rules governing its deployment.

The Portland Police Bureau initiated a limited UAS pilot project in 2023. During that time, we observed substantial benefits—particularly in safely de-escalating tactical incidents and in efficiently documenting crime scenes. In 2024, we expanded the program, training a small number of patrol officers to deploy drones in response to crimes in progress. This has further enhanced our ability to reduce risks to both community members and first responders.

So far this year, the Bureau has responded to over 49,000 calls for service. Our average response time for high-priority calls—those involving immediate threats to life or property—is approximately 16 minutes. Medium-priority calls average a 36-minute response time.

Like many law enforcement agencies, we continue to face significant staffing challenges, which are reflected in these response times.

Senate Bill 238-1 offers a thoughtful path forward. It would enhance law enforcement's ability to respond more safely and efficiently, allocate personnel more effectively, and improve decision-making before officers even arrive on scene. The bill also supports the implementation of drone-as-a-first-responder models, an emerging best practice nationally, and allows local agencies the flexibility to integrate this tool according to their operational needs and community expectations.

That said, I want to raise concerns about subsections 3(a) and 3(b) of the proposed legislation:

- Subsection 3(a) restricts UAS operations over commercial properties without owner consent and prior posting of conspicuous notices. This requirement could create a confusing and inconsistent operational environment, particularly in densely populated urban areas. It may also inhibit our ability to respond to exigent situations—such as burglaries in progress or illegal street racing events—which often take place in commercial parking lots.
- Subsection 3(b) prohibits the use of UAS for traffic enforcement. This limitation could reduce our ability to deter and manage dangerous driving behaviors during street racing or takeover events that pose real threats to public safety.

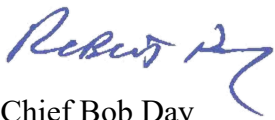
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When developing our UAS program, the Police Bureau proactively partnered with local officials to conduct a privacy impact assessment and to incorporate their feedback into our standard operating procedures. We also launched a public-facing dashboard to provide transparency about UAS deployments and operations. I believe these types of local efforts are well-suited to address the privacy and civil liberties concerns raised in subsections 3(a) and 3(b), without unduly restricting the operational value of this technology.

I respectfully urge the Committee to move Senate Bill 238-1 forward, while reconsidering the language in subsections 3(a) and 3(b) to ensure it does not unintentionally limit public safety responses.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Robert Day", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Chief Bob Day
Portland Police Bureau

RD/drh

C: Chief's Office Electronic File