

Submitter:

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On Behalf Of:

Committee:

House Committee On Rules

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

SB238

I oppose Senate Bill 238 because it seriously weakens privacy protections and expands police surveillance powers far beyond what is reasonable for a free society.

The biggest problem is that SB 238 removes the warrant requirement for most police use of drones. Instead of having to get a judge's permission or show true emergency circumstances, police could use drones for almost any "lawful police activity," which includes any call for service or undefined "public safety emergencies." These are broad and vague terms that can be used to justify almost any drone flight over homes, events, and neighborhoods, even for minor incidents. This is a major step backwards for Fourth Amendment rights and opens the door to routine government surveillance without proper checks and balances.

By making it so easy for police to use drones, this bill risks turning aerial surveillance into a normal part of everyday policing. Drones could be used for low-level incidents like noise complaints or domestic disputes. Once this technology is normalized, it is hard to stop police from using it more and more, with less public oversight.

SB 238 also allows information collected by these drones to be shared without any meaningful restrictions or requirements for transparency. There are no strong rules about how long police can keep drone footage, who can see it, or how it can be used. This increases the risk of misuse, unauthorized sharing, and even targeting of marginalized groups.

The bill gives police special exemptions for using drones over commercial property just by getting owner consent and putting up a sign, which could lead to bystanders and employees being watched without knowing it. While there is some restriction on using drones for traffic enforcement, there are many other situations where drones could still be used freely.

Unchecked drone surveillance makes people feel less free to gather, protest, or simply enjoy public spaces. It has a chilling effect on free speech and public life. Oregon should be setting a high standard for civil liberties, not lowering the bar.

For all these reasons, I strongly oppose SB 238 and urge lawmakers to protect our privacy and constitutional rights by rejecting this bill.