

Submitter: Jess Howell
On Behalf Of: South Coast Health Equity Coalition
Committee: House Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB238

Testimony in Opposition to SB 238A – Warrantless Drone Surveillance
Submitted by: Jess Howell, JEDIA Coordinator, South Coast Health Equity Coalition

Chair and Members of the Committee,

I'm submitting this testimony in firm opposition to SB 238A, on behalf of myself and the rural communities I serve—communities that are too often left out of the legislative conversation and too often surveilled without meaningful oversight.

As someone who lives and works in Oregon's rural counties, I know firsthand how policies like SB 238A disproportionately affect communities that already face barriers to power, resources, and privacy. Warrantless drone surveillance may sound like a neutral technology, but in practice, it compounds the long-standing surveillance burdens on Black, Indigenous and People of Color, immigrant, low-income, and unhoused populations, particularly in rural areas where there are fewer protections and fewer watchdogs.

Drones can cover vast and remote landscapes with minimal cost or public visibility, making rural regions easy targets for unchecked monitoring. This raises serious civil liberties concerns. The ACLU notes that drones can be equipped with thermal imaging, license plate readers, and facial recognition, enabling persistent surveillance that invades private life—even on one's own land [ACLU, "Protecting Privacy From Aerial Surveillance," 2021].

The use of drones without a warrant sidesteps the Fourth Amendment, which guarantees protection from unreasonable search and seizure. In rural Oregon, where people rely on privacy for everything from traditional land practices to recovering from trauma, to simply sitting at home with their family, this erosion of privacy is a form of state overreach that breaks public trust.

We've seen how surveillance tools are often used selectively and disproportionately: targeting protestors, tribal lands, undocumented communities, and those navigating poverty. A 2020 report by the Center for the Study of the Drone found that of law enforcement agencies using drones, nearly 90% were in jurisdictions under 50,000 people, suggesting their spread is concentrated in rural and small-town America.

SB 238A does not provide meaningful guardrails. It expands surveillance without strengthening accountability or transparency. It risks putting vulnerable communities

under a watchful eye, with no mechanism for redress.

As rural Oregonians, we deserve safety and privacy. We deserve public policy that doesn't treat remote geography as justification for unchecked government monitoring. I urge you to oppose SB 238A and protect our rights, our privacy, uphold existing legislation and the dignity of rural communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jess Howell, JEDIA Coordinator, South Coast Health Equity Coalition
Serving Coos and Curry County