

A Personal Appeal from a Combat Veteran: Why I Support HB 4138

A Call for Law Enforcement Transparency and Accountability

As a concerned Oregon citizen, decorated combat Veteran, humanitarian, and as simply a decent, good-hearted Patriot, I write in strong support of House Bill 4138, which establishes essential identification requirements for law enforcement officers and limits facial coverings during official duties. Due to the recent troubling trend of masked, unidentifiable federal law enforcement agents operating in American cities—including here in Oregon—I request immediate legislative action to protect public safety, ensure accountability, and preserve the trust between communities and those sworn to serve them. In a country such as ours, a global beacon for stability and democracy, this issue is unacceptable and needs to be addressed.

The Issue: An Alarming Rise of Unidentifiable Federal Agents

In recent months, Oregonians have witnessed a disturbing transformation in immigration enforcement under the Trump administration. Federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers and other federal agents now routinely conduct operations while masked, in plainclothes, and without visible identification. According to reports from the numerous local and national sources, these officers have been seen swinging batons, smashing car windows, shooting into family vehicles, and grabbing people off streets into unmarked vehicles. From the perspective of many of my friends- especially current and former law enforcement officers and Veterans- this is viewed as a troubling move away from democratic controls toward militarized tactics designed to instill fear and stifle dissent. Whether that is the intent or not, the impact is felt the same: people are scared.

In Oregon specifically, federal agents have detained parents in school parking lots and conducted arrests without proper identification. These practices violate basic principles of transparent policing and may even violate federal law requiring immigration officers to identify themselves when it is practical and safe to do so. The widespread deployment of masked officers creates confusion, undermines public safety, and opens the door to dangerous impersonations.

The Risks We Are Facing: Public Safety and Accountability Failures

The absence of proper identification creates serious safety concerns for everyone involved. Law enforcement uniforms were created, in part, to keep officers safe by providing a visual representation of their authority. Having unidentified officers conducting enforcement in plainclothes increases the risk of preventable conflicts and incidents, as local law enforcement officers may not recognize federal agents operating in their communities. Federal agencies typically do not notify local police when conducting operations, exacerbating this danger.

For me and my fellow community members, the inability to distinguish legitimate officers from criminals conducting kidnappings has led to an influx of calls to local police for help during what appear to be abductions or constitutional violations. Neighbors and bystanders witnessing masked individuals forcing people into unmarked vehicles reasonably believe they are witnessing crimes, not lawful enforcement actions. This erosion of trust between law enforcement and communities hinders the cooperation that effective community and immigration policing requires.

Most alarmingly, the widespread use of masks by federal agents has encouraged dangerous impersonations by criminals who have taken advantage of this trend to commit sexual assault, robbery, and kidnapping while posing as immigration officers. In North Carolina, a man impersonated an officer to sexually assault a woman by threatening deportation, while in Pennsylvania, an impersonator restrained and robbed auto shop employees. In California, investigators discovered someone with law enforcement equipment and federal agency documents who had a prior arrest for human smuggling. These incidents demonstrate how the failure to require visible identification endangers innocent people.

HB 4138 is a Reasonable Solution to Address These Concerns

House Bill 4138 addresses these critical concerns by establishing clear, reasonable requirements for law enforcement identification and restricting the use of facial coverings. The bill requires law enforcement agencies to maintain policies ensuring officers visibly display identification including their agency and either a name or badge number. It prohibits facial coverings except in narrowly defined circumstances such as undercover operations, SWAT operations where face protection is necessary, or protection from disease or environmental hazards.

This legislation provides three essential benefits. **First**, it increases transparency by ensuring community members know which agency and which specific officer they are interacting with, enabling them to understand their rights and the officer's authority. **Second**, it enhances accountability by allowing people to report misconduct and seek justice when officers violate policies or laws. Without identification, there is no practical way to hold officers responsible for unprofessional behavior or illegal activity. **Third**, it strengthens community trust by demonstrating that Oregon values democratic principles over authoritarian intimidation tactics.

The legislation includes appropriate exceptions for legitimate operational needs while ensuring these exceptions are narrowly tailored. It applies to federal law enforcement agencies and out-of-state agencies operating in Oregon, not just state and local police. This comprehensive approach is necessary because the Trump administration has ordered agents from numerous federal agencies—including the FBI, U.S. Marshals Service, DEA, and ATF—to participate in immigration enforcement, often without proper identification.

My Personal Appeal from a Combat Veteran

As a disabled and decorated combat veteran, it alarms and angers me to see masked, inadequately trained Immigration and Border Patrol agents operating in U.S. cities in the manner of secret police. I served this country for many reasons, including to protect democratic values and our constitutional rights, not to see them eroded by tactics more appropriate to authoritarian regimes than to a free society that prides itself on the rule of law, due process, and the protection of rights.

In the military, I understood that accountability and transparency were not obstacles to effectively completing a mission—no matter the type and complexity—but that they are the essential foundations of legitimate authority. Yes— the concerns by DHS officers about doxxing and threats to safety are absolutely legitimate—but these same concerns exist also for local police, legislators, media personalities, and other high-visibility folks, many of whom also receive threats. It would be pretty weird to see them wear masks to hide their identities. As

we've learned from our history of policing in America, they need to be especially transparent due to the huge amounts of responsibility and power they are entrusted with.

When officers hide their identities and agencies, they undermine the very institutions they claim to protect. State and local law enforcement across the country wear uniforms and display identification while performing duties that may carry greater risks than immigration enforcement. Federal agents should be held to the same professional standards. Simply being an undocumented individual, often someone seeking refugee or asylum status or a better economic situation, is not a crime worthy of the cruelty with which this administration is acting in their goal of 'mass deportation'. If DHS and their agencies are truly above-board (morally, ethically, and legally) in their efforts to find, arrest, and deport the "worst of the worst" while maintaining a secure border, and if they genuinely believe their role is to protect Americans, then we should expect them to understand these concerns and make necessary changes.

Oregon Must Lead!

Here in the Beaver State, we face a choice that may well shape the future for coming generations and determine what protections exist for the most vulnerable members of our communities. Oregon can and should be a leader in requiring ***full transparency for law enforcement***, setting a reasonable and legal standard that other states will follow. Or, we can remain passive observers as more preventable deaths and injustices occur because officers operate without the accountability needed with such a delicate task as immigration enforcement.

Twenty-one state attorneys general have already called on Congress to pass similar legislation. State legislators in California, New York, Massachusetts, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania have introduced bills to restrict masks and require identification. Oregon can join this movement and demonstrate that we will not tolerate authoritarian policing tactics within our borders.

HB 4138 represents a reasonable, balanced approach to a fixable problem. It protects legitimate law enforcement operations while ensuring officers remain accountable to the communities they serve. It increases public safety by reducing confusion and preventing impersonations. Most importantly, it reaffirms Oregon's commitment to democratic values, constitutional rights, and the American principle that no one—not even a federal agent—is above the law. I urge the Oregon Legislature to pass HB 4138- the right way- without delay.

With Respect,
Steve Schneider

My sources include official ICE & DHS publications, reports from institutes (Cato, CAP, ILRC, HRW), and news & media sources including The Atlantic, NYT, AP, NPR, Fox, The Guardian, WaPo, WSJ, Breitbart, and local.