



PRESS RELEASE

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Oregon House Sends Grand Jury Recording Bill to Governor

Senate Bill 505 requires recording of grand jury proceedings

At a time when the public is demanding more openness and accountability from law enforcement agencies—and government as a whole—Oregon is set to finally join the rest of the country in one key area of transparency.

Currently, Oregon doesn't require verbatim recording of grand jury proceedings—instead, the proceedings are documented solely through handwritten notes by one of the jurors. [Senate Bill 505](#), which passed the House on a bipartisan 34-26 vote, will finally reform that process by requiring that all grand juries be electronically recorded and stored.

The legislation requires district attorneys to delegate recording and instructions to a grand juror, and to use the type of audio electronic recording devices in use by the Judicial Department.

“At a time when much of the country is taking action to make the criminal justice system fairer to all, Oregon remains mired by an outmoded practice, and stands as a relic, and a reminder, of an unjust past,” says **House Majority Leader Jennifer Williamson (D-SW & NW Portland)**. “SB 505 gives Oregon long-awaited transparency, while protecting victims, witnesses, and jurors, and strengthening the legal process.”

Under current law, the grand jury's handwritten notes are often incomplete and unreliable. Particularly in the case of officer-involved shootings in which officers aren't indicted, this can leave families and community members completely in the dark about whether justice was actually served. There's no way for them to know with any confidence what evidence or arguments were presented to the grand jury. They have no way of knowing what grand jurors were told about the shooting and the events that led to it.

This lack of transparency can build deep distrust between law enforcement and the communities they are supposed to serve, which is why some counties, like Multnomah, already require recording of grand juries in police shootings.

SB 505 phases in the implementation of grand jury recording, beginning with Deschutes, Multnomah, and Jackson counties on March 1, 2018. All other counties will begin recording on July 1, 2019.

The bill provides strong protections for witnesses and victims, to ensure that all can testify openly and honestly without fear of unfettered exposure. The bill also protects the sanctity of the jury voting process, as well as the jurors themselves, by keeping their identities and their deliberations secret.

Having already passed the Senate, SB 505 is headed to the Governor's desk, where it's expected to get her signature.

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