



# PRESS RELEASE

## OREGON HOUSE DEMOCRATS

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### **Legislation to Strengthen Oregon's Hate Crime Law Clears the Oregon House, Set to Become Law**

*Legislation strengthens hate crime laws and reporting*

SALEM – Comprehensive legislation to strengthen Oregon's hate crime statute unanimously passed the Oregon House of Representatives today.

Senate Bill 577 makes changes to the crime of intimidation, including renaming it “bias crime”, and defining a bias incident, specifically making it a crime to commit a violent offense or the immediate threat of violence based on a person's membership in a protected class. Additionally, the legislation requires that data collected on bias crimes and bias incidents by the Oregon State Police, district attorneys and the Department of Justice be reported to and analyzed by the Criminal Justice Commission, and it creates a Hate Crimes Response Coordinator in the Department of Justice to receive and respond to calls regarding bias crimes.

“Thanks to the work of so many groups and the people who came forward to share their experiences, Oregon is about to have among the strongest hate crimes laws in the country,” said House Majority Leader Jennifer Williamson who carried the bill on the House floor. “This bipartisan legislation is an important step forward in our state. We will have better information about when hate crimes are happening, and we will have tougher penalties for dealing with them.”

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, Oregon was 11th in total hate crimes reported in the 10 days following the presidential election, a figure not adjusted for total population. Similarly, the FBI reports that Oregon's number of hate crimes reported increased over 60% from 2015 to 16.

The legislation also adds gender identity in the category of perceived characteristics of person against whom a bias crime can be committed and it directs the Department of Justice a hate crimes hotline, monitored by the newly created Hate Crimes Response Coordinator position, for people to report incidents.

Rep. Rachel Prusak (D-West Linn) spoke on the floor about the work being done in her own community

“Oregon's current hate crime laws are insufficient to hold offenders accountable and supports survivors of hate crimes and bias incidents,” Rep. Prusak said. “This bill ensures that we have a culturally competent, victim-centered system to report hate crimes and bias incidents.”

Senate Bill 577 is the product of a year-long task force process led by the Oregon Department of Justice and Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum, that included a broad range of organizations and stakeholders. The task force traveled across Oregon and made unanimous recommendations.

The legislation now goes to Gov. Kate Brown.

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