



PRESS RELEASE

OREGON LEGISLATIVE PEOPLE OF COLOR (POC) CAUCUS

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Oregon Legislative POC Caucus Calls for Action This Year on Police Accountability

SALEM, Ore. – The Oregon Legislative People of Color (POC) Caucus jointly announced today that they will ask their colleagues in the Oregon Legislature to take at least three specific actions this year to improve police accountability in response to the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent public protests and outrage in response to his death.

“In this historic moment, our words are not enough,” the House POC caucus members said jointly. “Only true concerted action can act as a salve for the wounds caused by centuries of targeted state violence on Black and Brown bodies. By prioritizing these criminal justice reform bills, we are upholding our commitment to extend protection under the law to all Oregonians. We are telling structural racism and police brutality that time is up, that justice is nigh, that not only will you be held accountable for your actions, but you will uphold the values in your oath of office: to faithfully, honestly, and ethically protect and serve.”

“Malcolm X said: ‘I’m for truth whoever tells it; I’m for justice whoever it is for or against,’” said Sen. James Manning (D-Eugene). “This pandemic has ripped away the band-aid covering what some thought was a scratch, but was a gaping hole. A deep-seated apathy in the soul of America that stems back over 400 years. An infectious disease just as deadly as the Coronavirus that has claimed countless innocent Black lives. This disease has many symptoms: prejudice, oppression, deprivation, indifference, lack of empathy, repression...all symptoms of a disease called hate. To heal America, we must be honest and truthful to ourselves and each other. We must also hold ourselves accountable. Justice for whoever it’s for or against.”

“The issue is simply two words: Accountability and Trust,” said Sen. Lew Frederick.

“Both are broken. It will take a major effort to establish them in our society. The myth that the system was sound has been overturned. Now the work begins.”

First, in an upcoming special session, the POC Caucus is requesting that a bill from the last two sessions regarding law enforcement disciplinary actions that go to arbitration be included in any proposed policy bills the legislature considers. The concept has been approved twice unanimously by the Senate, as [Senate Bill 383 \(2019\)](#) and [Senate Bill 1567 \(2020\)](#). The new law would prohibit an arbitrator from lessening disciplinary action against a law enforcement officer if the arbitrator and the law enforcement agency determine that the officer has committed misconduct.

Second, also in an upcoming special session, the POC Caucus is requesting the consideration of a new legislative concept that would authorize and require the Attorney General to investigate and prosecute, if the evidence dictates, any death or serious physical injury resulting from the use of force by a law enforcement officer. The POC Caucus believes that independent investigations are necessary for all cases where law enforcement kills or seriously injures civilians, and that the Oregon Department of Justice is the appropriate agency to be assigned this task.

Third, the POC Caucus is requesting that the House Interim Committee on Judiciary immediately convene a bipartisan work group to recommend changes to the state's laws regarding use of physical force or deadly physical force in making an arrest or in preventing an escape (ORS 161.235 and 161.239). This work will lead to a bill for the 2021 legislative session. The Caucus believes Oregon's standard for use of force needs to be strengthened.

"I firmly support the action plan put forth by the POC Caucus and will do everything I can to get this work done," said Oregon House Speaker Tina Kotek (D-Portland). "Oregon has an opportunity to address abuses that have gone on for far too long. We must rise to the challenge of this moment and make real change to create a safe and supportive community for all Oregonians."

Oregon has made some strides in recent sessions on improving police accountability. The most significant actions were the bills to prohibit racial profiling, track and analyze law enforcement stops, and require implicit bias training, [House Bill 2002 \(2015\)](#) and [House Bill 2355 \(2017\)](#). The legislature also established a framework for local police departments to implement the use of body cameras, [House Bill 2571 \(2015\)](#). The last time the Oregon legislature passed new requirements regarding use of force was in 2007 with [Senate Bill 111](#), which required counties to have approved "use of deadly force" plans. That legislation included other actions to be taken when a law enforcement officer is involved in a specific incident when deadly physical force is a cause in a death of an individual.

The members of the Oregon Legislative People of Color Caucus include Rep. Teresa Alonso Leon (D-Woodburn), Rep. Janelle Bynum (D-Happy Valley), Rep. Diego Hernandez (D-Portland), Rep. Akasha Lawrence Spence (D-Portland), Rep. Mark Meek (D-Oregon City), Rep. Andrea Salinas (D-Lake Oswego), Rep. Tawna Sanchez (D-Portland), Sen. Lew Frederick (D-Portland) and Sen. James Manning (D-Eugene).

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