

Senator Thatcher Vote Explanation for House Bill 4208 (2020 First Special Session)

As the Vice Chair of the Senate Judiciary, and a member of the Special Session Committee, I want to acknowledge that the work in the first 2020 special session around the issues of police accountability are a starting place, and not a final end point. Specifically, though I was supportive of the legislation concepts that were brought forward, in our haste to address the calls for law enforcement reforms, these measures barely scratch the surface and other concepts never even had an opportunity to be heard. Moreover, due to the Covid-19 shutdown of Oregon's Capitol, the public didn't have any meaningful opportunity to engage in the policy-making process. Oregonians deserve better from us.

It is worth noting that, to my knowledge, the language contained in HB 4208 had never been publicly vetted, reviewed or heard in a prior session, yet it became a focal point of police reform bills for the special session. The public was given a virtual public hearing June 23rd after Legislative Concept 78 (LC78) had been posted on June 22nd for just one day. Subsequently, the bill was rushed through the process and it is expected that by day's end on June 26th, 2020, Governor Brown will sign this measure into law. That's five days from concept to law, without significant public input. My goal in submitting a vote explanation isn't with regard to the policy, but rather to the process, which in its current form, is not in the overall best interest of Oregonians.

As a matter of preference, it is my hope that as we tackle weighty and important topics like police accountability, that the process is more robust, and all ideas are on the table. I've offered my assistance To Senator Lew Frederick, who has been working on these issues for many years, I've offered my assistance and will continue to make myself available to help address the inequity issues in policing.

Rightly, the legislature created its third-ever required statutory committee, the Joint Committee on Transparent Policing and Use of Force Reforms, so that we use our time in legislative sessions to address ongoing issues of how to elevate policing challenges so we can get to a point where we have safe, community policing that protects people, business, and property in a manner that is equitable, fair, transparent and accountable.

Lastly, it's imperative that we're thoughtful as a body about how the policies we legislate relate to how trust is rebuilt between communities of color and law enforcement entities.....in real time, boots on the ground, and that we're not passing untenable legislation that is rendered useless for its inability to be enacted in the community because the legislation wasn't properly vetted. That's why it's so important that as we continue this dialogue, we must get stakeholders to the table, invite robust public input, and eschew legislation that feels good, yet does little to nothing to restore faith between the police and our communities.