

ANNA WILLIAMS
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 52



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

June 26, 2020

Timothy G. Sekerak
Chief Clerk of the House
State Capitol Building, H271
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Vote Explanation on House Bill 4203

Dear Chief Clerk Sekerak,

I was proud to stand in solidarity with my colleagues on the People of Color Caucus of the Oregon Legislature when they first proposed House Bill 4203, a bill to ban chokeholds in law enforcement. I was also proud to cast my vote in favor of this symbolic measure, despite the fact that it falls far short of a true chokehold ban, which would have been my preference.

I believe that we, as elected officials in the state government, have a somber duty in this challenging time of social unrest: balancing the safety of our state's residents -- especially those from communities that have been disproportionately impacted by police violence throughout this state's history -- with each local government's need to effectively enforce the law.

House Bill 4203, while it broadly declares that an officer is not justified or reasonable in any circumstance to use a chokehold, makes an exception for any circumstance in which deadly force is justified under ORS 161.239. The justifications for deadly force under that provision are expansive, and I feel they should be less so, but that is not my reason for submitting a vote explanation.

In effect, we have passed a law prohibiting the use of a particular deadly practice *unless* deadly force is justified under the law. In effect, we have put into place the law that an officer is not allowed to use a chokehold unless the use of a chokehold is justified, which is redundant to existing law on the subject of police force and brings us no closer to a chokehold ban than we were before this special session.

I feel it is important as a symbol of our need to reform the way that our society polices itself that we pass a chokehold ban, but this measure falls short of that goal. I look forward to working with my colleagues, in the People of Color Caucus and elsewhere, to make more meaningful progress on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Anna Williams".

Representative Anna Williams

