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CONTACT: Rick Osborn, 503-986-1074
Rick.osborn@oregonlegislature.gov

Legislation to improve capitol culture passes through Senate

Legislation updates personnel procedures, creates Legislative Equity Office

SALEM – Bipartisan legislation aiming to make significant improvements to the culture at the Oregon State Capitol is on its way to Oregon Gov. Kate Brown for her signature.

[House Concurrent Resolution 20](#) and [House Bill 3377](#) update internal Capitol rules – both of which passed in the Oregon Senate today – ensure ongoing respectful workplace trainings and establish the independent Legislative Equity Office to handle complaints.

“The Capitol should be a place where people of all backgrounds and walks of life can come together for the common good of all Oregonians,” Joint Committee on Capitol Culture Co-Chair Sen. Ginny Burdick (D-Portland) said. “I have been committed to doing the work necessary to make sure everyone who works in or visits our State Capitol feels welcome and safe. This legislation meets that goal.”

House Concurrent Resolution 20 updates the Legislature’s current safe and respectful workplace policies that cover harassment, sexual harassment and discrimination. It expands the list of those subject to the respectful workplace rule beyond just legislators and staff to include interns, externs, volunteers, lobbyists, contractors, agency employees and members of the public visiting the Capitol.

House Bill 3377 creates a new independent, nonpartisan office within the Legislative Branch called the Legislative Equity Office. The office will be led by the Legislative Equity Officer, to be hired by the Joint Conduct Committee, which is an evenly split, bipartisan and bicameral

committee. The Equity Office is tasked with overseeing respectful workplace trainings, providing advice to individuals about their options with complaint and reporting processes and investigating complaints.

An offsite process counselor, modeled after the Title IX reporting on college campuses, also will be hired to provide confidential counseling about all options available for any individual who has experienced or witnessed harassing or discriminatory behavior involving the Capitol. The data from Title IX shows that when a person has experienced assault or harassment and has a safe, confidential and independent place to talk about their experiences, they are far more likely to report.

Three new reporting options are available to individuals who have experienced or witnessed discrimination or harassment. The reporting options seek to provide individuals with a full range of options to have their complaints handled to their satisfaction. These options are available through the Legislative Equity Office, in addition to the offsite process counselor established in House Bill 3377, as well as other external processes through the Bureau of Labor and Industries, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, law enforcement and civil procedures.

The legislation is the product of more than a year of work by a wide variety of experts and a bipartisan, bicameral group of legislators. In February 2018, Senate President Peter Courtney and House Speaker Tina Kotek asked the Oregon Law Commission to review and advise the Legislature on how best to revise its laws and policies related to workplace harassment.

The bipartisan, bicameral Joint Committee on Capitol Culture took that report, as well as a significant amount of comment from Capitol stakeholders, and developed legislation. For four months, the committee heard from survivors of sexual assault, individuals who have experienced various forms of harassment and experts in the fields of employment law and Title IX law. This legislation is the product of that committee.

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