



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

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Bill toughens penalties for official misconduct for public officials

SB 257 helps to protect vulnerable people by strengthening penalties

SALEM – The Oregon Senate passed a bill today designed to strengthen the penalties for official misconduct by public servants, when their actions put vulnerable people at risk of abuse or neglect.

Senate Bill 257 – which passed by a 22-7 vote on the Senate floor – makes second-degree official misconduct a first-degree offense when a public servant fails to perform a duty that is required of them by law and is aware of and recklessly disregards the risk that failure to carry out that duty will place a vulnerable person in danger of being a victim of a sex crime, experiencing a physical injury or being denied access to basic necessities like food or medical care.

While carrying the bill, the chief sponsor of the bill, Sen. Sara Gelser (D-Corvallis), referenced the case where public officials knowingly placed children in residential care facilities despite knowing they were unlicensed, had unqualified staff and had received reports about lack of access to food and basic care.

“The public invests its trust in public officials that oversee the care of children, the elderly and people with disabilities,” said Gelser, who introduced and carried the bill. “When that trust is betrayed and a public servant knowingly places a vulnerable person at risk of real harm by failing to carry out their statutory duties, there must be consequences. SB 257A increases the penalties for official misconduct and emphasizes the very serious commitment that Oregon has to the individuals in her care.”

Public servants include elected officials, agency directors, jurors and individuals working at the request of the state, a political subdivision or any governmental body within the state.

SB 257 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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