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Oregon Senate Approves Critical Legislation to Improve Police Accountability

SALEM – Today, the Oregon Senate unanimously approved Senate Bill 1604. This legislation is one of six police accountability measures led by the People of Color Caucus, which Democrats have made a key focus of this Special Legislative Session. This bill will provide clear and consistent expectations for law enforcement officers around the consequences of misconduct, ensuring accountability for officers and taking a step forward to improve public trust.

Law enforcement officers are public employees currently governed by the Public Employee Collective Bargaining Act (PECBA) which allows bargaining units and employees to agree to specific procedures to address a complaint or grievance, which often includes arbitration.

Currently, if a police officer has been found to have committed misconduct, the department will make its discipline decision and the officer may then appeal that decision and go to binding arbitration. If the arbitrator determines a lesser discipline than the department, it overturns the department's decision. This inconsistency presents legal challenges and confusion. It has also put the public at risk.

SB 1604 addresses the incongruity between these processes by requiring the disciplinary action taken by an arbitrator remain consistent with that of the agency if the police department and union have agreed to a discipline guide or matrix in the collective bargaining process and they have also found that an officer engaged in misconduct.

Senator Lew Frederick (D-Northeast Portland) has worked on this policy for years. A version of this bill has passed the Oregon State Senate in the last two Legislative Sessions with bipartisan support. As the tragedy of police violence and racism has led to a national uprising, this legislation is broadly considered long overdue.

“This bill, simply, is about police accountability. It is about ensuring a level of confidence in our law enforcement, both from the public and within the agencies themselves,” said Senator Frederick. “Senate Bill 1604 goes hand in hand with the restorative justice commitments each of us have made to our constituents. It is clearer than ever

that serious work is needed to improve trust and credibility in our law enforcement. When officers are not held accountable due to an inconsistent process, we directly work against building that trust.”

Senate Bill 1604 requires a law enforcement agency to include the creation of a discipline matrix or guide to considerations during collective bargaining, which would ensure the ramifications for misconduct are clear, consistent and transparent.

“This bill is a start and it’s an important start. We have more work to do and I look forward to working with all of my colleagues to continue to address law enforcement accountability and improve justice for all Oregonians,” said Senator Frederick.

During his closing on the Senate Floor, Senator Frederick referred to *Lift Every Voice and Sing* as a point of inspiration throughout his years of work. He shared the following lyrics:

*“Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us,
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on 'til victory is won.”*

Senate Bill 1604 now goes to the House of Representatives for a vote on the House Floor.

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