



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

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Safety for Oregonians in Public Office Is the Goal of Bill Passed Today in the State Senate

Senate Bill 1530 adds threatening a public official to the crime of aggravated harassment

SALEM, OR – Americans have witnessed a rise political violence nationally over recent years—such as the January 6, 2021, attack at the U.S. Capitol—and data shows that threats and other abuse are increasing against state and local officeholders as well. People threatening Oregon public officials will have increased accountability under Senate Bill 1530, which categorizes such credible threats as the crime of aggravated harassment under state law, punishable as a Class C felony. The new protections—passed in the Oregon Senate today—may allow more Oregonians to feel safe stepping forward to serve as state legislators, county commissioners, city councilors, school board members, and other local offices.

“I have been the victim of bomb threats,” said chief sponsor of the measure, **Senator James I. Manning, Jr. (D – Eugene, Elmira & Veneta)**. “I want to prevent the kind of chilling effect on public service that threatening behavior can cause.”

The Brennan Center for Justice, a national research organization, has measured the impact of intimidation against state and local officeholders. They found 43 percent of state legislators and 18 percent of local officeholders have received threats—communicating harmful intentions and implying imminent risk to safety—in recent years. They also report women in office were three to four times as likely as men to experience abuse (ranging from insults to physical attacks) targeting their gender, and officeholders of color were more than three times as likely as white officeholders to experience abuse targeting their race.

Without Senate Bill 1530, state statute has offenses related to harassment, menacing, and stalking, but none specifically addressing public officials, who often are targets of these crimes because of their public service. The bill addresses this gap by adding “public officials” to the state definition of aggravated harassment. The measure includes safeguards for free speech. It limits the crime of aggravated harassment to threats intended to cause alarm and threats conveyed because of a public official's role, position, or duties.

Senate Bill 1530 passed in a vote of 18 to 11. It now moves to the Oregon House of Representatives. Oregon's short legislative session must end by March 8 according to the state constitution.

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