



**Testimony of Becky Straus, Legislative Director
In Support of HB 2661
House Committee on Judiciary
March 11, 2013**

Chair Barker and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments in support of HB 2661, which directs the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) to study and report to the Legislature on racial, ethnic and economic disparities in citizen interactions with police officers and on recruitment and retention of minorities by certain institutions related to law enforcement. Directing a study of this nature is a smart and objective approach to issues of police accountability in Oregon. We thank the bill sponsor for bringing this issue forward and for the Chair for giving the bill a hearing.

In 2010 the ACLU of Oregon published the School to Prison Pipeline report¹ that compiled demographic data available from the Oregon Department of Education to highlight the racial and ethnic disparity in school discipline. In that report we also reported on similar disparities in the race and ethnicity of individuals incarcerated in Department of Corrections facilities. In 2008, though Black Oregonians made up just 2% of the state's population, they represented 9.7% of the prison population. Hispanic Oregonians made up 11% of Oregon's population, but 13% of the prison population. And Native Americans in Oregon made up 1.4% of the state population, but 2.4% of the prison population.

A study such as the one proposed by HB 2661 is important to help us account for these disparities in the criminal justice system. At what point and for what reasons are people of color overrepresented? Oregon needs better data to help us find these answers and, at that point, advance policies to address what we find.

Of course this goal and this approach is not new. The Law Enforcement Contacts Policy and Data Review Committee (LECC), set up in statute² and appointed by the Governor, routinely meets to address bias-based policing issues, to encourage law enforcement agencies to voluntarily begin collecting traffic stop data, to increase communication between communities of color and local law enforcement agencies, and to improve law enforcement training programs regarding bias-based policing. The LECC is currently staffed by the Criminal Justice Policy Research Institute at PSU and has accomplished many good things in the past 12 years, but there is plenty left to do – including getting more police departments to collect traffic stop data.

HB 2661 will be a helpful step to advance the work of the LECC. We urge your support.

¹ <http://aclu-or.org/content/aclu-report-oregon%E2%80%99s-school-prison-pipeline-0>

² ORS 131.905-910