



CITY OF PORTLAND, OREGON



Bureau of Police

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February 8, 2016

Oregon State Legislature
Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary
C/O Senator Floyd Prozanski, Chair
900 Court Street, NE, Hearing Room 343
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Prozanski and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

The Portland Police Bureau expresses its support of SB 1555, which allows for a polygraph test as a condition of employment for pre-employment screening of law enforcement officers and exempts the polygraph test from disclosure under public records law.

As you know, a polygraph is used to question individuals for the purpose of detecting deception or of verifying the truth of statements made by the individuals. There is no desire among law enforcement agencies to utilize polygraphs for any other stage of employment other than pre-employment investigations; the Portland Police Bureau is pleased to see language in SB 1555 that restricts the use of polygraphs to a "pre-employment screening measure" accordingly.

Over the past year, national expectations about police service have changed more so than any year prior. Here in Oregon, it has always been our goal to develop talented members who are culturally competent; ethically, physically and emotionally fit for duty, and well trained, highly skilled and responsive to the needs of their communities. Yet, not having access to a viable and [state] regulated human resource tool that focuses on truthfulness is holding this profession back from the next phase of community-focused policing.

Furthermore, Oregon's law enforcement agencies are experiencing unprecedented staffing shortfalls. Law enforcement agencies are competing to hire from a shrinking pool of interested candidates on the West Coast. Because law enforcement agencies in our neighboring states of California and Washington have authority to use a polygraph as a tool in the recruitment of members, recruits that fail the hiring processes in these jurisdictions are coming to Oregon. The Police Bureau has invested time, money, and hope into the background investigation of recruits that ultimately do not meet our "fitness for duty" standards. A polygraph would enable background investigators to more accurately, thus more efficiently, reach applicable investigation determinations.

Time is of the essence. The hiring of the right people for the job(s) of law enforcement is critical to agencies and the community alike. The authority to use polygraphs for pre-employment purposes will increase the accuracy, thus the efficiency of background investigations, correct staffing shortfalls and unintended administrative consequences, increase morale, lower representation costs, and enable law enforcement executives to lead their agencies in accordance with modern public expectations.

Thank you in advance for your support of SB 1555.

Sincerely,

LAWRENCE P. O'DEA III
Chief of Police

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