

February 22, 2016

To: Chair Barker, members of the House Judiciary Committee  
RE: SB1555  
From: The Oregon Council of Police Associations (OCPA)

The Oregon Council of Police Associations (OCPA) opposes SB1555. We believe that the key to having good officers and professional agencies is to have thorough background checks, psych exams, strong field training programs and supervisors that promote a culture of service to the public .

Police agencies already perform rigorous background investigations prior to hiring new officers. The research and references compiled from these investigations is based on an individuals personal and professional history, these findings uncover tangible details of applicants previous experiences; as told by numerous sources as well as the candidate. These findings are by far more useful than data collected from a polygraph exam, which simply assess physiological responses to questions.

Considering that job interviews are high stress situations, it is probable that an interviewee could experience an increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure, and other symptoms associated with stressful experiences that could lead to false polygraph readings. Because of the well-documented inconsistencies with results from polygraph tests, they cannot be required in court cases and the results are not admissible in the course of a civil or criminal trial.

The current environment for police officers has already been negatively impacted due to public opinions surrounding high profile nation-wide officer involved incidents. That, partnered with the inherent danger associated with the job and the non-traditional hours and limited budgets can discourage interested parties from seeking a career in law enforcement. By singling candidates out as the one profession in the state that can be required to pass a polygraph before being hired we are throwing up another road block to being able to secure the needed officers to satisfy Oregon's law enforcement needs. This is especially concerning considering that sociopaths have demonstrated the ability to "beat" a polygraph test even when they are lying and others have "failed" the exams due merely to the stress and discomfort they experience during the exam.

Additionally, there are obvious expenses affiliated with performing these exams. So, despite the intent to maintain the current systems for conducting background checks, with limited financial and personnel resources some agencies could ultimately take short cuts while doing the background investigations, with the belief that the polygraph test would fill the gap. Unfortunately, it would not supply the same information.

Finally, complete overhauls in large police departments have been required in the last few years to deal with corruption, profiling, etc. The largest and most drastic example is in New Orleans. Others mentioned are Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati. All of the States listed allow or require pre-employment polygraphs for officers, Louisiana has been using them for 30 years, and clearly they still have issues with officer misconduct.

OCPA strongly encourages you to reconsider SB1555. OCPA completely supports efforts to strengthen the quality of new hires for police departments throughout Oregon. However, not only do we not agree that this bill will accomplish that, it would pose other complications from discouraging applicants to spending limited resources.