



OPAL
Environmental Justice Oregon

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May 24, 2017

House Committee on the Judiciary
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: SB 357

Chair Barker, Vice Chair Olson, Vice Chair Williamson and Members of Committee,

On behalf of OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon I write to you all in regards to SB 357. As an Environmental Justice organization that prioritizes community empowerment and self-determination through grassroots organizing, OPAL responds to the needs and priorities of our constituents in low-income communities and communities of color. A just transportation system that provides access to opportunity is fundamental to livability.

We know that fares have become more expensive and as transfers and service has become less sufficient, more riders have been forced to make challenging choices, including taking the risk of evading fares in order to complete necessary transit trips. Similarly, fear-based protective measures which are achieved through the increased criminalization of poverty have been proven not to protect society, instead only increasing the historical burdens weighing upon the shoulders of communities of color and low income, such as the new transit police detention center in Portland.

SB 357 demonstrates that our decision makers are prioritizing the safety and well-being of transit users by decriminalizing the charge of interference with public transit (IPT) when one boards or unlawfully remains on a public transport vehicle or station. Many transit-dependent riders come from communities of color and low income. The individuals who face this charge experience constant fear and stress due to financial burdens. A criminal charge should meet the severity of the crime, and currently IPTs are classified too severely, wasting public dollars and punishing the poor for the crime of travel.

The increased toll of severe IPT charges also burdens the tax-paying public as, up until recently, IPT charges have made up a large portion of the caseload in Multnomah County's Community Court. In 2014, it is estimated that courts spent approximately \$1.4 million on IPT charges in the Portland-metro area. This estimate does not include costs associated with arresting offenders, transporting them, and lodging them in county jails.

While other jurisdictions have positive track records in preventing the abuse and overuse of IPTs, this progress is not felt uniformly around the state of Oregon. This bill is essential to ensure that all transit riders and community members equally benefit from public policy, and to push back against a racist and unproductive War on Poverty, toward policies of equity and restoration.

Sincerely,

Maria Hernandez
Advocacy Coordinator

**Building Power for Environmental Justice
and Civil Rights in Our Communities**