

July 9th

**ATTN: Joint Committee On Transparent Policing and Use of Force Reform**

Chairs Bynum, Manning, and members of the committee,

Thank you for holding these important hearings on police transparency and accountability.

My name is Sal Peralta. I am a member of the McMinnville City Council and Secretary of the Independent Party of Oregon, a minor political party with 125,000 members statewide.

I would like to express my support for making membership in extremist groups a factor when considering the fitness of a candidate to serve as a law enforcement officer. I agree that this should be a part of the certification and credentialing process for police. I would support other further actions you might take to address misconduct through the credentialing, training and certification process of officers. These are necessary and overdue.

In addition to what you have discussed today, I believe that both the initial racist conduct of the officer in Milwaukee that set off the wave of national protests, and the conduct of some officers and departments, nationally and in Oregon, justifies a broader and stronger response to address extremist attitudes in policing.

There is an urgent and appropriate role for the state to play.

Many Oregonians are rightfully afraid to raise complaints locally, for fear of retaliation, and have legitimate concerns about whether local jurisdictions are willing or able to “police themselves” when history and common sense have shown otherwise. Abusers will not hold themselves accountable.

As I indicated in testimony during the recent special session, I believe that your committee should consider establishing a Civil Rights Commission, accountable to an independent board, to address the issue of extremism in local policing.

Oregon's current civil rights law and civil rights commission housed through BOLI is aimed at discrimination in employment, not policing, and its scope is too narrow to meet this emergent need. You might consider a model similar to that of the ombudsman that was established for public transparency.

**The need for such a commission could not be more clear:**

During the past few months, I have received direct complaints and have seen a great deal of media coverage about actions of local law enforcement, including elected officials, that raise concerns about extremist attitudes.

**Specific examples that have been brought to my attention:**

- 1) The role of some Oregon county sheriffs in promulgating a national hoax that originated among white nationalist groups that Antifa was coming to [insert city near you] and distributed throughout the country, including in the Pacific Northwest.
  - In eastern Washington, this hoax resulted in a bi-racial family being chased by truckloads of armed men who cut down trees to prevent the family from leaving a campsite.
  - In Coquille, an armed vigilante group of more than 200 gathered, according to media reports, at the urging of some county sheriffs and at least one officer in the Oregon National Guard. In one instance a sheriff used solipsis (saying/not saying) to create plausible deniability to his role in generating an armed public response. I have had reliable reports that at least one Coos County Commissioner and members of the Coquille City Council were involved as well.
  - Both the Medford Mail Tribune and the Coos Bay World both reported people of color having guns pulled on them in racialized incidents in the

immediate aftermath of this hoax.

- The Mayor of Phoenix, OR hit a protestor with his car.
  - There was video posted on social media of African American teens being harassed on the street by a group of young men in Coos Bay while the narrator describes officers doing nothing other than ticketing a person who stopped to intervene.
  - I have taken a verbal report that a family in Coquille is afraid to leave their home because of how they have been treated.
- 2) In Portland, PPB has been involved in more than 50 incidents of violence involving either media or protestors. These are well-documented and I will not go into the full record, except to say that the number of incidents in Portland was more than 2x that of any other city in the country.
- 3) In Salem, local law enforcement appeared to give preferential treatment to Proud Boys related to that city's curfew. This mirrored a similar incident in Portland a few years earlier.

These kinds of actions have undermined public confidence in the good work of most local police and has contributed to a growing number of racialized incidents in rural communities and have contributed to a sense of fear among persons of color in several parts of our state.

As an elected official who represents an ethnically diverse community that includes a large number of latinx immigrants, I would encourage you in the strongest of possible terms, to take the lead to bring the full panoply of state power to bear on this question of guaranteeing that locally elected and hired law enforcement and public officials are held accountable to ensuring full equality before the law for every citizen of this state.

Thank you for considering this testimony and for your service to the State of Oregon.

Sal Peralta