

I write to you in support of the legislature passing LC 17. I have been an ordained Episcopal Priest for over 25 years serving in congregations in Vancouver, Wa, Bend, and Coos Bay before retiring a year ago in Sisters.

I strongly support the legislature passing LC 17 because I am very concerned about the increased use of crowd munitions to control protests, even when they are peaceful in nature. This represents an erosion of our constitutional right to protest and gather peacefully. Over the last several months there have been many examples across our country and state of peaceful protests that have been disbursed by the use of crowd control munitions by police and federal agents and I believe that this is an abuse of power that needs to end. The argument is that this use of force is the only way to control the "unruly crowd", but in my experience this is simply not true.

Several weeks ago I was part of a peaceful protest of about 500+ people in a parking lot in Bend. Our intent was to support and come alongside two undocumented community members who had been detained by ICE early that morning and were being held in an unmarked ICE bus without having been told their rights or why they had been detained. As it started to get dark we were told that it had been confirmed that 50 federal agents were on their way and we needed to be prepared for possible tear gas or rubber bullets. We were asked to sit down so that it would be very clear that we were there as a peaceful protest. Someone pointed out a drone overhead and agents observing through the windows in the building behind us as we waited peacefully.

During the whole protest, I was sitting about 50 feet in front of the ICE bus which gave me a great vantage point to observe. When the federal agents arrived, suddenly there were fully armed and aggressive agents in front of us forcefully removing anyone in their way of taking the two men from the bus. The only violence I witnessed that night was initiated by the federal agents.

As I sat there with armed federal agents in front of me, and a drone overhead I realized that the last time I had experienced something like this was when I was in Gaza last October. Drones overhead and armed Israeli guards everywhere you looked to supposedly keep order and control over the Palestinians. In Jerusalem an attorney who runs "Court Watch", a non-profit that helps educate Palestinian children and youth about their rights, had spoken to us. He helped us understand that it was common practice for Israeli's to unlawfully go into homes and detain children and youth in the middle of the night.

That was my experience in October 2019 in Gaza, an area where there is known "apartheid like" oppression that has been going on for decades between the Israelis and the Palestinians. This was August, 2020 in a hotel parking lot in Bend, OR, a resort like place to live, destination spot for many to visit, a sanctuary city in a sanctuary state and I'm witnessing two men who had been detained at 5:30 am in an unmarked vehicle without being told why, not told their rights, not given access to an attorney or adequate water and food...with a drone overhead and armed federal agents using tear gas and rubber bullets to control a crowd that was sitting down on the pavement. It was later reported by some that we were a violent crowd and it was the only way to control us, but in no way was that my experience!

I was stunned that this was happening in my town and in our country and I'm not sure I would have believed it if I hadn't witnessed it myself. I love our country and believe in the democracy that it stands for, an inclusive democracy for all people. We all need to work hard to defend that democracy and to ensure that it really is for all people and that it does truly protect everyone.

The legislation that is currently being considered to reform policing in our state is important as first steps. As part of that legislation, I strongly urge you to pass LC 17 so that we can end use of this kind of crowd munitions in the streets and communities of Oregon.

Respectfully,

The Rev. Christy Close Erskine

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