



Chair Prozanski and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

For the record, my name is Kayse Jama, and I am the Executive Director of Unite Oregon, a statewide organization dedicated to creating an intercultural movement for justice. I'm here today to urge your support of SB 577, which would modernize Oregon's hate crimes law and protect vulnerable Oregonians.

Unite Oregon is led by people of color, immigrants, refugees, and low-income individuals, and our organization has offices in Portland, Beaverton, and the Rogue Valley. Every one of these local chapters has reported an increase in incidents of bigotry and hate crimes. Our Medford office was picketed by armed members of right-wing, racist organizations just two years ago. Our members are scared, and they're asking for your help.

We need to start by acknowledging that across the country, hate crimes are on the rise, directed at communities of color, immigrants and refugees, women, and lesbian, gay, trans, and nonbinary members of our communities. Oregon is no exception. In fact, we're seeing a greater increase in bias incidents in our communities than the nation as a whole. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, Oregon had the 11th-highest number of hate crimes reported following the 2016 presidential election – and that number isn't adjusted for population. Between 2015 and 2016, the number of reported hate crimes in the US rose 4.6%, but Oregon has seen a 60% increase in the same period. We flat-out do not track incidents which are rooted in hate and bigotry, but do not rise to the level of "hate crimes" under the law. We know that there's an increase in hate incidents, but we don't know much beyond that.

Hate crimes go beyond physical attacks on a person. Regardless of the form they take, they're traumatic incidents that stay with you for a long time – sometimes, your whole life. They terrorize individuals and whole communities, leaving you with a lingering sense that you are unsafe in spaces which previously felt familiar. They reinforce the idea that Oregon is a state by and for certain communities, at the expense of others. We need solutions to protect vulnerable communities, and SB 577 represents a powerful opportunity to do just that.

Critically, this legislation centers the victims of hate crimes by creating a service-driven, culturally competent response system for victims of hate activity and bias crimes. It provides local law enforcement agencies with the opportunity to refer victims to the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division for assistance, safety planning, and other services if their case cannot be prosecuted for some reason. It standardizes the data collection and reporting system, ensuring that our Criminal Justice Commission has the tools they need to understand the problem, which is the first step toward solving it. And the bill modernizes our existing hate crimes law, which was written in 1981, and has not kept up with the times.

I want to note the process that led to the bill before you. After hearing report after report of hate crimes impacting vulnerable Oregonians, Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum convened a diverse task force of different stakeholders to tackle the issue. The task force included representation from



community-based organizations like my own; law enforcement; prosecutors and defense attorneys; the ACLU of Oregon; and the state agencies which oversee law enforcement. We worked together to identify proactive, victim-centered policies which would give law enforcement, the state, and advocates the right tools to address hate crimes and bias incidents. And that process is why SB 577 is such a strong piece of legislation.

Communities across Oregon are crying out for help. Please, hear them, and vote YES on SB 577. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Kayse Jama

Executive Director

Unite Oregon