

Chair Williamson and members of the House Committee on Judiciary-

I am writing to express my support for HB 3224 which would require Oregon's District Attorneys to develop explicit policies surrounding their core functions and make those documents readily available to the public. As a longtime good government advocate, I can attest that this bill advances concepts that are foundational to a functional democracy. Transparency is not only an important value that voters and residents prefer, it also produces more effective and consistent organizations and builds public trust.

As a career public servant at different levels within large bureaucracies, I can state unequivocally that lacking formal/written policies is risky for an organization. When different people operate from varied understandings of policy it breeds inconsistency which in turn exposes the organization to complaints and discrimination suits. It also encourages inefficiency and an inertia that makes it difficult to adopt new best practices. With respect to criminal justice, these effects erode Oregonian's faith that our justice system is fair and effective. The data show that there are marked discrepancies between how DA offices around the state are operating. Those differences could be justified, but as circumstances stand currently, there is no way for the public to know if the disparate outcomes result from different prosecutorial strategies or from employee mistakes or something nefarious.

District Attorney offices are multimillion dollar public organizations that serve vital roles in our community, however they often operate with limited public oversight. The public deserves to know their basic charging, policies and be able to independently verify that individual cases are being treated in accordance with those policies.

I urge you to support HB 3224 to shed light into our top prosecutorial decisions.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue

James Ofsink