

Sal Peralta, City Councilor Ward 1

503.437.2833

6/25/2020

**Testimony in favor of SB 1604 and other policies**

Chairs Courtney and Kotek and members of the committee,

Thank you for your service to Oregon and for hosting these important committee hearings. Senator Courtney, I appreciated your opening remarks yesterday about the need for America to come to terms with its racial divide. I share those concerns.

My name is Sal Peralta. I am a member of the McMinnville City Council. I would like to offer my support for SB 1604. The single most important thing you can do in this special session to ensure racial justice in policing and safer community policing overall, is to allow Oregon police departments to get rid of officers involved in inappropriate use of force cases.

I can find no instance in Oregon where an officer fired for inappropriate use of force has not had that determination overturned in arbitration. Such an outcome occurred in the City of McMinnville, which was forced to reinstate an officer having paid out more than \$400,000 to settle a claim that received national attention 8 years ago.

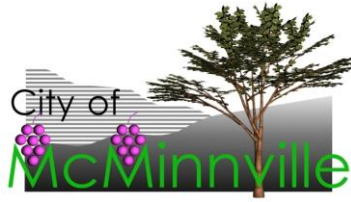
I understand that there are disagreements and objections to the bill. Though I agree with those who would like to see SB1604 go further, given the time constraints you are operating under, I believe you should seek to pass this formulation with broad support now, and use the momentum to strengthen it later rather than make last-minute changes in this short session. This will set a strong foundation for long-term collaboration on other needed reforms.

In future sessions, I believe that lawmakers should also look at the accreditation standards for police officers and how those are applied in Oregon. With or without legislation, standards could be applied to make it harder for officers with discipline-related issues to move from agency-to-agency without substantial re-education and additional certification.

**Beyond that, I would like to call your committee's attention to an urgent related matter that I believe are worthy of this body's attention.**

Earlier this month, several county sheriffs and other local elected officials in southern Oregon helped to promulgate an armed vigilante response to a militia-inspired hoax that Antifa was sending people to infiltrate and to attack rural communities.

In Coquille, purportedly at the urging of the Coos County Sheriff, one or more members of the Coos County Board of Commissioners and one or more members of Coquille City Government, more than 200 vigilantes took to the streets to "fight off Antifa".



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This was a hoax, but a concerning one. The conduct of these and other public officials and government employees, including an officer in the Oregon National Guard, put Oregon communities at risk.

It revealed substantial ties between these officials and extremist militias, a shocking lack of media literacy among elected officials, and very likely a bias that may affect both policing and the general treatment of persons of color or anyone else who looks like “they don’t belong” in some parts of our state.

These are not alarmist concerns. On the same night that these armed vigilantes gathered in Coquille, in eastern Washington, a bi-racial family was menaced by 4-8 truckloads of armed men who chased them at highways speeds and cut down trees in their campsite to prevent them from leaving.

Local residents in communities around are state are afraid to step forward and say anything for fear of retaliation. This demands a response from Oregon elected officials.

I have asked the Oregon Department of Justice and the Governor to open an investigation into the conduct of these local officials. I would ask legislative policymakers to use your influence to encourage those investigations.

In addition, I would like to encourage the legislature to take two further actions:

- 1) Set up a civil rights commission to examine racist and extremist attitudes among police and county sheriffs in the state of Oregon. There does not appear to be any state commission tasked with that role related to law enforcement. Civil rights generally appears to fall under BOLI and is targeted at employment-related claims.
- 2) Lawmakers should allocate specific funding for the Oregon Department of Justice to investigate extremism in county and local law enforcement as it relates to the militia movement and/or attitudes of the police towards the press.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns.

Sincerely,

Sal Peralta  
McMinnville City Council