



Catholic Charities



Jewish Federation
OF GREATER PORTLAND



Statement in Support of Police Accountability Measures as First of Many Needed Community-Centered Reforms

June 23, 2020

Co-Chairs Courtney and Kotek, Co-Vice Chairs Girod and Drazan, and Members of the Joint Interim Committee on the First Special Session of 2020:

As members of the faith community in Oregon, we support the passage of police accountability legislation put forth today by the People of Color Caucus, and call for further reforms based in the contributions of community-led organizations and the insights of our state's tireless Black faith leader advocates.

Where equal treatment and personal safety should be the most basic outcomes of policing, whole segments of our society live in fear of unwarranted harassment and violence at the hands of their sworn protectors. Our faith tells us to seek an end to violence of all forms, to treat our neighbors in the same manner we would like to be treated. Those of us who are white know very clearly that we are treated better and are viewed with less suspicion by police than people of color. That is not right.

Measures to create a statewide police discipline database, make it easier for police officers to be fired if found guilty of misconduct and require police to report misconduct of other officers will lead to accountability, justice and better community-police relationships.

We acknowledge that Senator Frederick and the larger Legislative People of Color Caucus have been leaders on these and other police accountability measures for years, without much success, and that our support is long overdue. The frustration in our state that has burst out in the last month over the murder of George Floyd has

been partly the result of a lack of progress of and partnership around Sen. Frederick’s initiatives. Police malfeasance was and is too much for anyone of good conscience to ignore.

We also believe there remains urgent, unresolved systemic problems that are not fully addressed by the measures you consider today, or that are not addressed at all. We look to impacted community members, community-led organizations, Black faith leaders and the wisdom of our faith traditions to help our state continue this pressing reform effort.

The need for a more just criminal justice system – and the need to actively combat the systemic racism and societal faults that lead to this broken system – are evident in data depicting disproportionate impacts meted out by that system for Black Oregonians and people of color.

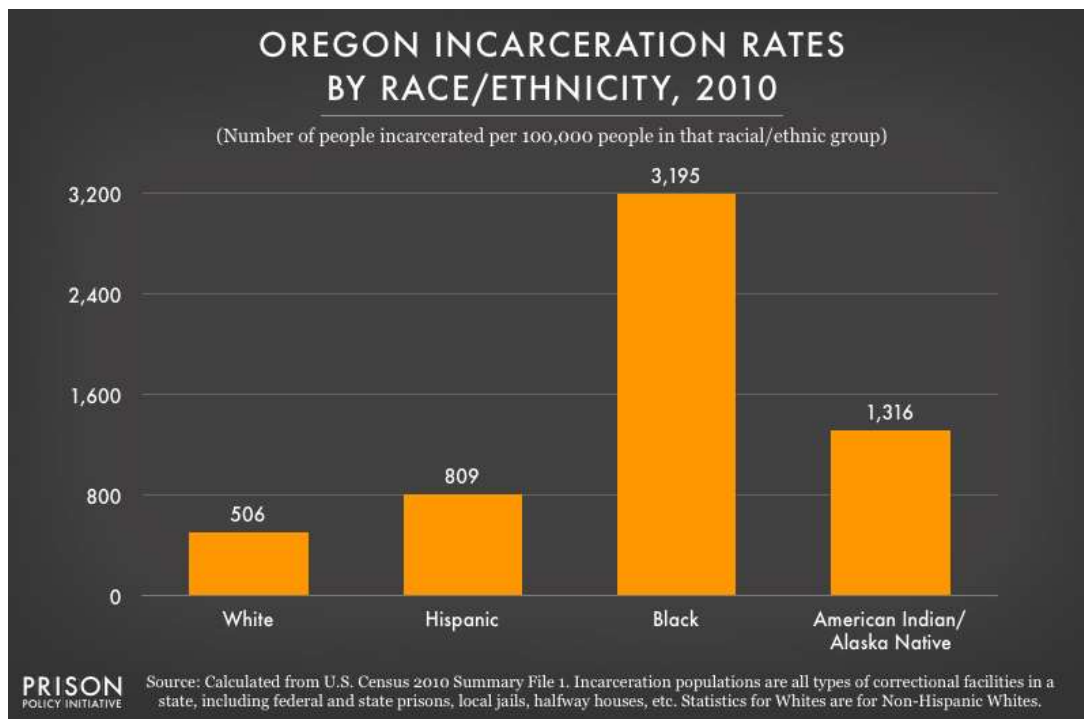
These disproportionate impacts are seen in the use of deadly police violence...

Nationally, Black Americans are only about 13 percent of the population, but make up over 30 percent of people fatally shot by police.¹

In rates of arrests for nonviolent crimes like drug possession...

“A 2018 report by the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission (OCJC) revealed that black Oregonians were over 3 times more likely than white Oregonians to be arrested for drug possession despite similar rates of drug use. These disproportionate arrest rates not only reflect but also reinforce structural racism through criminal records that limit individuals’ ability to obtain a job or be promoted, obtain rental housing, get student loans, get a professional license, and obtain credit cards.”²

And in rates of incarceration...



Prison Policy Initiative: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/OR.html>

¹ Source: U.S. Census Bureau

² Source: DeSantis, Michael, *Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon 2020 Ballot Measure Guide*

The call for accountability and changed systems, however, must extend far beyond the issue of police misconduct and oversight, or the racial disparities in our jails and prisons.

The measures proposed by the People of Color caucus are only necessary because the full dignity of Black Oregonians and people of color is not recognized in our cultural narratives, our mindsets, our leadership or our systems.

Unchecked and ignored systemic racism deprives individuals of hope, instead instilling despair. Systemic racism casts aside promise, injures soul and body and senselessly divides when our faith tells us our lives are to be lived in embrace of a united, beloved community.

We urge you to continue this work with the passage of these policy bills, but to then turn to the work of advocating, healing, investing and leading until every Oregonian is free from the shackles of systemic racism.