



Policing bill would repair police, community relations

This sort of common-sense reform, at the Oregon Legislature, would be a step in restoring faith in our police forces.

By Richard Goerling and Diane Goldstein
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Across the country and here in Oregon, people have lost faith in our police forces. Recent polling from the Pew Research Center found that only 26% of us have a "great deal" of confidence in the police, with young and non-white Americans being more likely to report less confidence. This is due, in part, to the racial bias involved in traffic stops across the country—Black drivers are 20% more likely to be pulled over, and up to twice as likely to be searched despite being statistically less likely to have contraband on their person as white drivers.

The data is similar in Oregon. The state's Criminal Justice Commission found that racial disparities have persisted in traffic stops as recently as 2021, where Black, Latinx, Native Americans, Middle Eastern and Asian/Pacific Islander people are all more likely to be stopped than whites.

These are dismal statistics. In order to improve police-community relations, we first have to understand how that trust was broken. Over the course of my career as a police officer,

I learned that one of the biggest reasons people came to distrust us is because we are expected to respond to petty legal infractions and "quality of life calls" that do not rise to the level of a true public safety concern.

Oregon legislators now have a chance, in the form of Senate Bill 1510, to turn the ship around. It would ban pretextual stops for traffic violations like a single broken tail light or headlight. These unnecessary stops have little to no effect on crime rates, but they do sometimes lead to officer-involved shootings, which further reduce trust in police and lead to the understandable belief that police are not here to serve and protect.

Legislation like SB1510 is not unprecedented; in 2020, Virginia passed a similar law. Top local prosecutors in cities including San Francisco and St. Paul, Minnesota have announced policies to decline certain charges arising from pretextual stops. The Los Angeles Police Department is now looking to limit these stops as well. And in Oregon, the Portland Police Bureau has already taken affirmative steps in this direction.



We are in a crisis. [Evidence-based violence prevention programming](#) has been shown to reduce violence in communities, but in order for these policies to work, community members must have trust in law enforcement. SB 1510 will help rebuild that trust and allow police to focus on more pressing crimes.

SB1510 is a bridge to restoring our communities' trust in law enforcement and one that will help police to more effectively address violent crime. Police-community relations need to be at the forefront of every discussion involving police reform. Pretextual stops don't make us any safer, but the policies included in SB 1510 will.

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