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TRIBAL LIAISON



State of Oregon
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February 28, 2022

Chair Wagner, Vice-Chair Knopp and Members of the Senate Rules Committee:

For the record, I'm Shemia Fagan, I use she/her pronouns and I'm honored to serve as Oregon's 28th Secretary of State. My mission is simple, it is to build trust. To build trust between the people of Oregon and our state government so that our public services can make a positive difference in people's lives. One of my most important roles as Secretary of State is as Oregon's chief elections officer. It is my top priority to protect Oregonians' right to vote in elections that are secure, accessible, and trustworthy.

The 2022 Legislative Session comes amid a sustained campaign of false information that threatens Oregonians' trust in our elections. The spread of false information has created an environment that poses real-world risks to elections workers in Oregon.

The bill we are discussing today, HB 4144-A is about protecting the people who protect our democracy. Our elections are run by members of the community in all 36 counties across Oregon, hard working professionals from both major political parties who are doing incredibly important work in a very challenging time.

In the months leading up to and since the 2020 election, election workers across the country have faced verbal abuse, harassment, and violent threats on their lives. A [special report](#) by Reuters documented hundreds of those threats and hostile messages to U.S. elections workers. A survey of front-line staff in the Oregon Elections Division conducted in January 2022 found that 10 of the 13 workers responding had experienced harassment or threats while doing their jobs. Elections officials in at least two counties have received death threats.

In response to this environment, I am asking you to approve HB 4144-A, the Election Workers Safety Bill, part of the Protect Our Democracy Agenda.

In preparation for this hearing, we surveyed the staff in our elections department. The results are heartbreaking.

Point of Contact:

Jessica Ventura, Legislative Director
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10 out of 13 staff who responded said they have personally experienced harassment or threats while doing their jobs.

I am going to take a moment to read some of the quotes from workers because it's important that their voices are heard in this room.

One worker said: "After the harassment we faced starting in 2020 I've seriously considered finding another job ... the risks to personal safety are too high."

Another said that "[2020] quickly wore me down and caused me so much stress I would cry at the end of the day. All we want in this office is to do our job and provide clear and transparent elections.

Yet another said that "Callers frequently became combative on the phone and would make sexually explicit remarks to me ... Candidates for office would frequently swear at me for decisions I had no control over ... Our email boxes were filled with emails calling for forensic audits and other misinformation and veiled threats that it became difficult to do our work."

What manager could hear this and not do something to protect the people they manage?

HB 4144-A will provide safety measures for election workers across our state. We know election officials are being harassed here in Oregon and we're seeing some disturbing trends nationwide. A recent study by the [Brennan Center reported](#) that 1 in 3 local election officials are concerned about facing harassment or pressure while on the job. Last year in Washington state, the elections director had to relocate because of threats to her and her family at their residence. HB 4144-A has two aspects – address confidentiality and increased penalties for harassment.

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We know that election workers are concerned about their personal safety and, after consultation with the Oregon Association of County Clerks, the provisions in this bill have been identified as necessary steps toward improving election worker safety.

HB 4144-A also sends a powerful message to those who may seek to interfere in elections administration: threatening or harassing elections workers will result in penalties; it will not change the outcome of an election. This is an extremely important message to send after the January 6 insurrection in Washington, D.C. and other related events around the county.

As we head into the 2022 election season, we must do all we can to protect election workers against physical harm fueled by false information. I urge you to pass and support of HB 4144-A.

You can contact our Legislative Director [Jessica Ventura](#) for additional questions on HB 4144-A.

Sincerely,

Shemia Fagan
Oregon Secretary of State

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