



April 24th, 2023

TO: Chair Kropf and Members of the House Judiciary Committee
FROM: Association of Oregon Counties
RE: AOC support for SB 787

Dear Chair Kropf and Members of the Committee,

I offer this testimony in support of SB 787 on behalf of the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC) which has represented Oregon's county governments since 1906.

Most of us have witnessed moments on the road where safety was compromised because a driver was distracted. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has stated that driving while texting is six times more dangerous than driving drunk. If the distraction of text messaging can be that dangerous, imagine how dangerous it would be for someone to be assaulted while driving. Then, imagine the driver is piloting a 40,000 pound bus full of dozens of people.

Public transit vehicle operators must maintain focus and concentration at all times for the safety of those riding in the vehicle and that of all the other road users around the vehicle. Assaults against public transit vehicle operators may cause injury not just to the person being assaulted, but also anyone riding in the vehicle or anyone in the vicinity of the vehicle, because the driver could be distracted or incapacitated, which could cause a crash. Therefore, assaulting a public transit vehicle operator has many potential victims beyond the individual being assaulted.

Additionally, offensive behavior that may not be serious enough to be considered assault under normal circumstances becomes significantly more serious if directed against the driver of a public transit vehicle. For these reasons, enhanced penalties for assaults against public transit vehicle operators are justified, and certain offensive behaviors that would normally not meet the threshold of legal assault should be treated as assault when directed against a public transit vehicle operator who is carrying out their duties.

AOC supports SB 787 and we urge the Committee to vote in favor to help protect the safety of Oregonians who ride public transit, as well as everyone else on our roads.

Best,

Michael Burdick
Legislative Affairs Manager for Public Safety
Association of Oregon Counties