



February 14, 2024

To: House Committee on Judiciary
From: Zach Winston, Director of Policy and Outreach

Re: **Opposition to HB 4135**

Chair Kropf, Vice-Chair Andersen, Vice-Chair Wallan, and members of the House Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Zach Winston, I am the Director of Policy and Outreach at the Oregon Justice Resource Center (OJRC). The OJRC works to promote civil rights and improve legal representation for communities that have often been underserved in the past: people living in poverty and people of color among them.

The OJRC strongly opposes HB 4135, which would create a new crime of threatening a mass injury event. Law enforcement and prosecutors, under existing criminal laws, already have the tools to address the behavior that this new bill seeks to target. Importantly, the State's ability to use its immense power to prosecute and incarcerate people is supposed to be difficult, especially when speech is involved, because doing so risks causing a chilling effect on speech.

The criminalization of individuals targeted by this bill—many of whom may be struggling with substantial mental health needs and illness—will not lead to improved public safety and community well-being outcomes. Instead, people struggling with mental health needs and illness will have their ailments exacerbated in the traumatic and harsh environments that are jails and prisons. We know that arrests and incarceration can often lead to individuals losing their jobs, their housing, their families, being separated from loved ones, and not receiving their regular medication.

Furthermore, OJRC has significant concerns that HB 4135 will lead to youth having their lives completely upended and destabilized, potentially trapping them within the revolving door of the criminal legal system and school-to-prison pipeline.

Creating a new crime with significant and unaddressed First Amendment and youth justice concerns is unnecessary and excessive. Better legislation can be drafted and passed to prevent mass injury events; this is not one of them. **We urge you to oppose HB 4135.**

Thank You,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Zach Winston' in a cursive script.

Zach Winston
Oregon Justice Resource Center
Director of Policy and Outreach