



February 17, 2026

House Committee on Rules
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97701

RE: Support for HB 4177 and HB 4159

Chair Bowman, Vice-Chairs Elmer and Pham and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to follow up on my verbal testimony today and state my support for HB 4177 and HB 4159. I appreciate the Committee's work to strengthen Oregon's ethics laws while ensuring they remain fair, workable, and compatible with the practical realities of local governance.

In 2023, the Legislature passed HB 2805 to address serious concerns raised by instances of secret meetings between members of elected public bodies that rose to the level of a quorum of members making decisions outside of a public meeting. The effort to reinforce transparency in response to these situations was well-intentioned. However, the bill's final language has proven confusing and overly complex. Even the Oregon Government Ethics Commission's (OGEC) own staff have faced difficulty interpreting and training officials on its requirements. At one point, some local officials were advised that simply speaking to the media, or to constituents, might be construed as using a conduit to conduct a serial meeting. That is not a tenable or reasonable standard for public service.

HB 4177 offers much-needed clarity while preserving transparency. The bill ensures that deliberations and decisions occur in public while eliminating the risk that officials could be sanctioned for seeking routine information on policy issues, procedural matters, or meeting logistics. Public officials should not be placed in jeopardy for trying to do their jobs responsibly.

The bill also addresses another significant challenge created under current law: the risk that individual officials could face administrative violations for actions they do not control. Mayors and councilors do not publish meeting notices or preparing minutes; those are administrative functions carried out by staff. If an error occurs, it should be the agency—not individual elected officials—held accountable. HB 4177 corrects this imbalance.

I also want to express my support for HB 4159. Over the past two years, as OGEC has implemented the rules flowing from HB 2805 and addressed questions such as those that led to HB 4161 (clarifying that providing food at meetings is allowed), it has become increasingly clear that the Commission would benefit from additional members who understand the day-to-day operations and practical constraints of cities, counties, and special districts. HB 4159 takes an important step in that direction.



Together, HB 4177 and HB 4159 improve clarity, accountability, and fairness in Oregon's government ethics framework, while maintaining the transparency and public trust that our communities expect. I urge your support for both bills.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "MK", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Melanie, Kebler
Mayor, City of Bend