

Testimony on HB 3443

My name is Dr. Randall Blazak and I'm here as the chair of Oregon's Coalition Against Hate Crimes. Our coalition has been a vital part of the response to bias crimes in the state since 1997 and represents a vibrant network of community stakeholders and local, state, and federal agencies. The coalition played a role in the support for and implementation of SB 577, our innovative new bias crime law. It is my privilege to offer support for HB 3443, to further protect the victims of bias crimes and incidents.

One of the primary reasons we categorize bias crimes differently from other crimes is because the trauma they place on victims and their communities. Research shows that victims of bias crimes tend to have longer lasting physical, emotional, and psychological challenges. They have been targeted because of some immutable characteristic about themselves: their race, religion, their sexual orientation, or other identifying category. The fear of losing the security of their place of residence should not be added to the trauma they are experiencing. Trauma requires stability and security to heal. And that trauma also spreads through the victim's community as others fear that they will be the next to be targeted.

Additionally, we know that bias crimes are vastly underreported. One reason is the fear that the police share the same biases as the attacker. The state's bias crime hotline was established to give those targeted by hate an alternative means to report crimes and incidents.

Another reason for underreporting is fear of retribution by those who have been accused of the hateful act. By not protecting the confidentiality of those who have reported victimization, we are paving an easy path for that retribution to occur. It could be by the attacker, who files for a public records request, state actors, or, indirectly, by letting the media, including self-proclaimed journalists, publicize identifying characteristics of the victim or the victim's experience.

SB 577 was designed as an innovative statute that was both victim centered and trauma informed. HB 3443 furthers the law's original mandate to protect bias victims so they can feel secure in reporting crimes and incidents to the state.

Thank you.