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Testimony in Support of SB 621

9 March 2021

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and members of the committee:

I am writing to express Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's support for SB 621, providing essential protections that allow implementation Multnomah County Measure 26-217, as it was approved by 82% of voters this past fall.⁴

Measure 26-217 approved the implementation of an independent police oversight board appointed by the Portland City Council. The board is tasked with investigating uses of deadly force by police and other complaints. The board would also have access to records, could compel witness statements, and have authority to discipline (including termination) police officers.¹

Working with over 150 congregations, organizations, and interfaith partners, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) strives to envision communities of faith in partnership creating a more peaceful, just, sustainable, and compassionate world. EMO works with and for Oregonians through direct service programming, dialogue, and advocacy.

As affirmed in a statement by faith leaders in Multnomah County's voter's guide: "As faith leaders, we are taught when there is trouble you go right to the heart of it because if one of us suffers, we all suffer"¹. During the 2020 General Election, the people of Multnomah County had an opportunity to stand with those across the county, state, and country who live their lives in fear of the future as a result of "an unjust and racially biased police culture."¹

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon stands with leaders in Oregon's Black community, for whom the contents of Measure 26-217 represented a decades-old call for change.¹ We know that Black Portlanders are disproportionately policed, and face the highest chance of being killed by police.^{1,2,3} In Portland, the police arrest Black individuals at a per capita rate 4.3 times higher than white people.³ In relation to the 5.8% of Portland residents who are Black, interactions with police are highly disproportionate.³ EMO affirms that tangible change requires real action, and that the will of the people, including the 82% of voters who overwhelmingly approved this measure, must be affirmed.⁴

In accordance with our statement of social principles and as people of faith, EMO seeks a "government and social order that is founded on principles of human dignity and political equality, is responsive to human needs and aspirations, sustains robust civic participation and religious freedom, and furthers social justice and the common good."⁵ Undoubtedly, this includes necessary and comprehensive change that allows police accountability to be the status quo.

We thank you for your work and for your consideration of this essential legislation.

In partnership,

Olivia Asato
Public Policy Associate
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

¹ <https://multco.us/file/92543/download>

² <https://www.wweek.com/news/2020/12/23/before-george-floyds-death-black-portlanders-were-killed-by-cops-at-a-disproportionate-rate/>

³ <https://www.opb.org/article/2021/02/07/portland-has-5th-worst-arrest-disparities-in-the-nation-according-to-data/>

⁴ <https://www.oregonlive.com/crime/2021/02/portland-police-contract-talks-city-wants-to-limit-overtime-union-leaders-bash-voter-approved-police-oversight-board-measure.html>

⁵ https://emoregon.org/pdfs/Public_Policy/EMO_Statement_of_Social_Principles_rev2012.pdf