



2017 State Legislative End-of-Session Report

- **Overview**

On the morning of July 7, the Oregon State Senate adjourned (*sine die*), and the Oregon House of Representatives followed suit in the afternoon, finalizing a long and difficult session. For the first time in over 10 years, both chambers chose to adjourn at different times (unlike the traditional simultaneous fall of the gavel) illustrating the contentious nature of the 2017 session. Despite these difficulties, both chambers passed a “provider tax” protecting Medicaid expansion, a \$5.3-billion transportation plan, Health Care for All Kids to expand health insurance to undocumented children, and the raising of the age to purchase tobacco from 18 to 21. All of this despite a budget shortfall of nearly \$1.6 billion.

The Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) saw a mix of success and failure. While pleased to see the passage of funding for senior and anti-hunger programs, as well as the Extreme Risk Protection Order (a gun safety bill highlighted later), the JCRC was disappointed that a legislative resolution opposing the Boycott, Divestment, Sanction (BDS) movement, funds for communities to combat wage theft, and the Charleston loophole bill did not advance.

The JCRC also participated in and helped organize Interfaith Advocacy Day in early February. This longstanding program, planned in partnership with the Christian, Muslim, and other faith communities, included a morning of issue briefings and advocacy training followed by an afternoon of lobbying the legislature on funding for programs that support vulnerable populations, as well as sensible gun safety bills. **This session marked the largest ever Interfaith Advocacy Day with an attendance of approximately 500 people.**

- **Protecting services for Seniors and People with Disabilities & Strengthening Food and Nutrition Programs to Help End Hunger**

The JCRC consistently advocates every year to protect Medicaid funding for Oregon’s most vulnerable populations, as well as support funding for home- and community-based service options. The JCRC strenuously opposes cuts to the Medicaid reimbursement rates for nursing facilities, which, in the Jewish community, would significantly impact the Harold Schnitzer Center for Living in Southwest Portland.



This session was particularly challenging for human services as Oregon faced a \$1.6-billion shortfall for the 2017-19 budget cycle due to higher Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, increased PERS costs, and ballot measures that passed in the 2016 election.

House Bill 2391, a key piece of legislation creating \$670 million dollars in new revenue, passed both the House and Senate and was signed into law by Governor Kate Brown. Commonly known as the “Provider Tax,” the legislation increases an assessment on urban hospitals’ net revenue to 6% and places a 1.5% tax on insurance premiums. The money covers the cost of the 350,000 additional people who now are eligible for health insurance created through Medicaid expansion and ensures that the most vulnerable Oregonians have health insurance. This money also guarantees that Medicaid reimbursement rates for nursing homes, rather than suffering cuts, will remain flat. In addition, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 558, making it so that all children, regardless of residency status, have access to health care.

On the hunger front, the legislature added an additional \$900,000 (over ‘15-’17 biennium levels) to help Oregon’s emergency food network build community-level solutions to hunger and food insecurity.

- **Advocating to Protect Workers Against Wage Theft**

The JCRC believes that every worker has the right to live and labor with dignity, safety and hope. Wage theft is a property crime, and in order to deter crime we need to see an increase in the likelihood of getting caught and in the cost to those who violate the law. The JCRC supports more tools to ensure that enforcement mechanisms are effective in holding unlawful employers accountable. This session, we supported the package of bills brought by the Wage Theft Coalition.

House Bill 3008 creates a new cause of action when an employer requires an employee to sign a false timesheet, along with new penalties. The bill passed the House 53-5. It was referred to the Senate Workforce Committee where it received a positive reception. The bill ultimately passed the senate on a 23-4 Aye vote and was signed into law on June 21. The measure goes into effect on January 1, 2018.



House Bill 2856 would have created a fund (\$2 million) for the Bureau of Labor and Industry to grant money to community groups for counter-wage theft work. The bill was voted out of the House Business and Labor Committee and went to the Joint Ways and Means Committee, where, regrettably, it remained on adjournment.

- **Stopping Gun Violence**

The JCRC is a coalition partner with the Oregon Alliance for Gun Safety. We are jointly committed to making Oregon safer by keeping guns out of the hands of criminals and dangerous individuals. The group is made up of businesses, faith communities, service organizations, nonprofits and elected officials. The Alliance introduced the following bills this session:

Extreme Risk Protection Order (Senate Bill 719). This bill allows families and law enforcement to prevent tragedy by petitioning a court to temporarily suspend a person's access to firearms if there is documented evidence that an individual is threatening harm to self or others. It passed the Senate floor on a 17-11 vote (Senator Boquist was the one Republican yes vote) and passed the House on a narrow 31-28 vote. Governor Brown stated that she will sign the bill into law.

Charleston Loophole (Senate Bill 797 and Senate Bill 764). These bills, which would have closed the hole that allows a gun sale to move forward after 3 days even if the background check is not completed, were heard in the Senate Judiciary Committee. Unfortunately, they did not move forward due to a technical procedural issue. House leadership looked for a vehicle in the House to amend and move the bill forward. However, the Senate informed the House in the last week of the session that they could not support the bill and it subsequently died.

- **Rejecting the Anti-Israel BDS Movement and Affirming Support for a Two-State Solution**

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement undermines peace, promotes extremism, exacerbates conflict and seeks to damage the relationships between Jews and other faith/ethnic communities that have been nurtured for years. This resolution, which rejects the BDS movement, recognizes the positive relationship Oregon has with Israel while affirming the right of *both* the Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and security.



SCR 25 was assigned to the Senate Rules Committee. All members of the committee were sponsors of the resolution, yet, unfortunately, it was never scheduled for a hearing by Senator Burdick, the committee chair. JCRC members tried to meet with the senator on multiple occasions, but were denied the opportunity to express our concerns in a face-to-face meeting.

It ultimately became apparent that the legislation was not going to move during this session (despite having 13 senate cosponsors—8 Democrats and 5 Republicans), and the JCRC now needs to look to a future legislative session. Senator Steiner Hayward, who strongly supported the resolution, has agreed to sit down with the JCRC to strategize on how to move beyond the current obstacles preventing this bill from advancing to the floor.