



## Jewish Federation of Greater Portland 2021 Oregon Legislature End-of-Session Report

Oregon's 81<sup>st</sup> Legislative session adjourned on Saturday, June 26<sup>th</sup>, finishing what will be characterized as one of the most unique and challenging sessions in Oregon's history. The State Capitol, closed to the general public because of the coronavirus pandemic, was limited to just legislators and staff. All committee hearings were conducted virtually, House and Senate floor sessions were limited to smaller groups of people at one time, and lobbying occurred only by text, email and phone calls. Legislators had more money (\$2.6 billion more than anticipated) to spend in over a decade, with the federal government providing significant Covid-19 relief dollars and Oregon's economy growing at a quicker pace than pre-pandemic numbers. All of this occurred at the same time one House legislator resigned under pressure due to accusations of sexual harassment and another House member was expelled by helping plot a State Capitol incursion.

This session, a new group of lawmakers representing Oregon's Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) caucus also significantly influenced the session by introducing legislation addressing social inequity, racial justice, and police accountability. These issues are prominent and central to the dialogue taking place throughout the nation.

The JCRC continued to lobby and advocate on issues that are central to its mission. At the same time, we continue to push for equity and justice. Despite being limited due to the virtual nature of session and not having an in-person lobby day in the Capitol, the JCRC lobbied for the passage of several measures and many members actively reached out to their legislators.

### Protecting Services for Seniors and People with Disabilities

The Jewish Federation's Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) supports the safeguarding of Medicaid funding for Oregon's most vulnerable populations, and we are thankful that the budget was completely funded for the 2021-2023 budget cycle. The budget has enough money to cover the increase in demand for Medicaid, which added about 300,000 people during the pandemic. The program provides health care coverage to one in four Oregonians.

The funding increase stems from a variety of sources. For instance, additional tobacco tax revenue is providing \$414 million for Medicaid because voters passed Ballot Measure 108 last November. The budget also factors in a higher federal matching rate for Medicaid that started last year due to the pandemic. That accounts for an estimated \$240 million during the first three quarters of the budget cycle, which starts in July.

Additionally, the state's economic outlook has improved, and lawmakers have extra money in the forecast. In May, state economists told lawmakers to expect an extra \$1.18 billion in the current budget cycle, which ends June 30, and an extra \$1.25 in the state's next two-year budget cycle. Despite the good news, lawmakers anticipate that the growth in revenue will also trigger the tax "kicker" next spring.

## Preventing Gun Violence

The JCRC is a coalition member of the State of Safety Action group. 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 unions, health care providers, tribes, religious groups, businesses, and non-profits. Last year, gun sales increased 43% in Oregon, and 40% of those purchases were by first-time buyers according to retailers.

The JCRC offered testimony in support of **Senate Bill 544**, which passed and was signed by the governor. The bill requires gun owners to secure their weapons when not in use, either by placing them in a locked container or by using a trigger lock. The measure also requires people whose guns are stolen to promptly report the theft to law enforcement.

**SB 544** also includes language that allows schools, colleges, the State Capitol and the Portland airport to ban weapons, including those individuals with a concealed handgun license. As introduced, the bill applied to all government buildings, but was limited to the aforementioned.

Unfortunately, **HB 2543**, another bill addressing gun violence and supported by the JCRC did not pass. That measure, commonly referred to as the "Charleston loophole," prohibits the transfer of a firearm by a gun dealer or private party if Department of State Police is unable to determine whether recipient is qualified to receive a firearm. Law enforcement often claim it takes longer than the statutory timeline to determine if a person is legally allowed to possess a firearm.

## Education/Ethnic Studies

In 2017, the JCRC was involved in creating new statewide ethnic studies standards for public K-12. Currently social science standards include basic civics, economics, geography, and history of the United States. But these standards lack the contribution of a more robust historical narrative that centers on the histories, contributions, and perspectives of "historically marginalized communities" and individuals. In addition to the traditional groups (Native American, African-American, Asian, Pacific Island, Latino,

women, people with disabilities, etc.), the JCRC is seeking to include the history and perspectives of the Jewish community.

**HB 2166**, a key priority of Governor Brown, focuses on creating culturally-specific education settings for children, increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of Oregon's teachers, and ensuring that all students can be successful in preschool and early-learning programs. This will require the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to work more closely with communities that historically were subjected to bias, racism, and discrimination to better understand these perspectives and to create a better public education system. The bill also creates a pathway for nontraditional licensure, understanding that teachers that come from and look like the communities they serve often provide better engagement and outcome for students. The bill passed and was signed by Governor Brown.

## Protecting Workers Against Wage Theft

The JCRC believes that every worker has the right to live and labor with dignity, safety, and hope. The JCRC is a member of the Oregon Coalition Against Wage Theft, which introduced several pieces of legislation this session. Unfortunately, similar to last session, they did not pass into law.

**HB 2358** would have required employers to pay agricultural workers overtime wages if hours worked exceed 40 in a work week. The bill was amended in the House Rules Committee to appropriate \$100 million to the Oregon Business Development Department for a program to provide payments to employers who pay overtime wages to agricultural workers. However, this was not enough to convince moderate legislators that the farming economy would not be negatively impacted. Proponents of the legislation plan to bring the issue back for the 2022 legislative session.

Additionally, **HB 2205**, the “Just Enforcement Act,” failed to move forward this session. The bill would empower workers by giving them the ability to enforce their workplace rights in court and avoid forced-arbitration agreements. A workgroup is being formed to continue the discussion in the interim.

## Other Legislative Issues with JCRC Involvement

**Doxing.** **HB 3047** establishes a civil cause of action for improper disclosure of personal information. Sometimes referred to as “doxing,” this occurs when a person discloses the personal information of another for the purpose of harassing, stalking or harming the individual. Unfortunately, this practice has become more common with recent events around riots and several people in the Jewish community have been victims of this tactic. The bill passed and was signed into law by the governor.

**Immigration.** **HB 3265** prohibits law enforcement from denying public services, benefits

and privileges to certain individuals based on their federal immigration status. The bill requires law enforcement to explain to the individual that they can refuse to disclose nationality, citizenship, or immigration status. It also prohibits the use of public funds to assist federal immigration enforcement and requires that requests for assistance be reported to the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission for review. Notably, this legislation provides a private civil action against a law enforcement agency or public body that violates its prohibitions. The bill passed and was signed into law by the governor.

**Police Reform.** The JCRC also tracked a significant number of police conduct and accountability bills. Rep. Janelle Bynum (D - Happy Valley), Oregon's only black woman lawmaker and the Chair of the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Equitable Policing, is largely credited with authoring and shepherding dozens of bills through the process. These include requiring officers to report misconduct by their colleagues, demanding more public reporting on police discipline and setting up a new civilian board to oversee police discipline. Also, in light of the protests last year in downtown Portland, several bills would limit law enforcement's use of gas and rubber bullets for crowd control and require police agencies to participate in the FBI's national use-of-force data collection. All of these reforms were signed into law by Governor Brown.

**Climate Change. Senate Joint Memorial 5** urges Congress to pursue viable solutions to the threat posed by climate change and pass the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act. This legislation would impose a fee on the carbon content of fuels, including crude oil, natural gas, coal, or any other product derived from those fuels that would result in the emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Despite bipartisan support, the bill failed to move out of the House Rules Committee.