

Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) 2023 End-of-Session State Legislative Report

Sunday, June 25th marked the conclusion to the 82nd Oregon Legislative Session. In the beginning, for the first time in the past three years, the session seemed back to normal with committee meetings back in person and lobbyists/the public walking the Capitol halls. Despite the sounds of ongoing construction (the Capitol is undergoing a \$500-million remodel and seismic retrofit), freshmen legislators commented how much they enjoyed the collaboration and bipartisanship. Governor Kotek also saw early success with the passage of her housing and homelessness package (\$200 million) in late March.

Unfortunately, all this changed after the House passed legislation on reproductive health/gender affirming care and gun limits (HB 2002 and HB 2005). Both measures were viewed as too extreme by Senate Republicans and they refused to show up for floor sessions, ultimately preventing a quorum and shutting down the process. It wasn't until six-weeks later, after the longest legislative walkout in Oregon's history, that Senate Republicans agreed to return in exchange for significant amendments to the forementioned bills. With just eight days left in session (Oregon's Constitution required adjournment by June 25th), legislators worked frantically to pass state agency budgets and additional legislation. While they were ultimately successful in getting the budgets completed, the shortened timeline left many bi-partisan bills on the table. Much of this work will now get carried over to the 2024 Legislative Session.

The Jewish Community Relations Committee (JCRC) was very active this session, tracking and advocating on over 24 pieces of legislation.

Protecting Services for Seniors and People with Disabilities

The JCRC supported the safeguarding of Medicaid funding for Oregon's most vulnerable populations, as well as funding for home and community-based service options. This includes support for the increase in demand for Medicaid due to recovery from the pandemic. It is estimated that the Oregon Health Plan currently provides health care coverage to *one in four* Oregonians, or almost \$1.7 million people.

The JCRC supported fully funding Medicaid to ensure access to the Oregon Health Plan. This includes maintaining Governor's Kotek's recommended budget in general funding for the Oregon Health Plan. The 2023 budget funds significant expansion of eligibility without reducing benefits or payments to providers (SB 5525). That money also includes full funding for the Healthier Oregon program, which ensures that people of any age or immigration status may qualify for full Oregon Health Plan benefits if they meet certain income requirements.

Homelessness and Housing

The JCRC, along with its interfaith partners (United in Spirit), is concerned about the homelessness crisis in the Portland area and across the state. We believe that what is needed in the immediate term

is an exponential increase in safe transitional shelters with wrap-around behavioral health and substance abuse services to accommodate the high number of people currently living on the streets.

The JCRC supported Governor Kotek's agenda (HB 2002) this session to advance this goal. "My top priorities since Day One have been to reduce homelessness and support housing development and improve access to mental health and addiction services," Governor Kotek stated.

HB 2002 allocated \$155 million to support the homelessness state of emergency and meet the goal of reducing unsheltered homelessness over the course of 2023. Over the next two years, additional money will rehouse an additional 750 households, maintain shelter operations, create new permanent supportive housing and provide ongoing support for 700 newly added shelter beds. The bill was signed into law by Governor Kotek on March 29th.

Additional legislation added \$200 million to expand capacity for detox and substance abuse residential treatment facilities, provide incentives to stabilize and support behavioral health workforce, and increase community services for individuals who are likely to end up in the state hospital.

Holocaust Education Funding and Ethnic Studies

In 2019, the JCRC helped pass legislation requiring the Oregon Department of Education to include Holocaust and genocide education in public schools. However, there was no money attached to this legislation and the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education has absorbed most of the costs for developing resources and providing teacher training. The JCRC supported Senate Bill 1050, which appropriates \$240,000 from the General Fund to the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to provide professional development to teachers and administrators relating to Holocaust and genocide studies and ethnic studies content. The bill passed both the Senate and House unanimously and now awaits Governor Kotek's signature.

The JCRC also supports statewide ethnic studies standards for public kindergarten through grade 12. But these standards should include the history and contributions of the American Jewish community, along with the other historically marginalized communities (Black, Latino, Asian, Native American). The JCRC worked this session with Rep. David Gomberg (D-Lincoln City) to introduce House Bill 2905. This legislation adds, "Jewish" to the list of groups whose histories, contributions and perspectives are required to be included in social studies academic standards and instructional materials. The bill passed both the House and Senate unanimously and was signed by Governor Kotek.

Preventing Gun Violence

The JCRC is committed to making Oregonians safer by keeping guns out of the hands of criminals and dangerous individuals. We continue to support efforts by coalition partners in developing and bringing gun violence prevention measures to the legislature. The JCRC supported and testified on legislation this session (HB 2005) to increase the age of purchase and ownership of most guns from 18 to 21, allow cities to ban concealed weapons in public buildings and ban "ghost guns" (these are

3-D printed firearms without serial numbers that are assembled at home and can be easily purchased online).

Unfortunately, with the Senate Republican walkout, Democrats were forced to concede on many provisions of the bill. Both the purchase of guns by minors and allowing more local control by cities were ultimately removed from the bill. Only the “ghost gun” component remained and passed both chambers before going to the Governor for signature.

It should be noted that the Oregon State Police (OSP) did see an increase in funding for background checks. This was a concern brought forward after Measure 114, a gun safety ballot measure approved by voters last year, became law. OSP is expected to hire additional staff and equipment to more quickly process the permits required to purchase a gun, among other restrictions.

Supporting Reproductive Choice

The JCRC believes that Jewish values compel us to support full access to safe and legal abortion care as basic health care. Every single person must be allowed to make their own moral and faith-informed decisions about their body and health. This session, the JCRC supported and advocated for HB 2002, legislation that ensures Oregonians have safe access to the full scope of reproductive health services, gender affirming care and protection for those individuals who provide it. The measure passed the House on a bipartisan vote after 10 hours of debate, but ultimately became the focus of the Republican walkout.

The chief concern of the Senate Republicans centered around parental rights. As drafted, the measure would have made it clear that all minors have a right to receive an abortion without parental notification. Additionally, minors would have access to gender affirming care medications/procedures, such as puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones and surgeries (often without parental consent).

As part of the deal to bring the Republicans back to the Capitol, Democrats agreed to modify the bill. Parental permission would still be required for a child under 15 to get an abortion (unless overridden by a health care provider when information provided to the parent could provide harm), abortion access would be limited on university campuses, and parts of the bill creating pilot projects for mobile abortion clinics for rural parts of the state would be eliminated. The watered-down bill passed the Legislature and is headed to the Governor’s desk for signature.

Climate Change

The JCRC believes that climate change is an urgent global security threat and one of the greatest moral issues of our time. This session, the JCRC’s Climate Action Committee supported legislation to promote renewable energy and other clean-energy innovations that will enable Oregon to lower its carbon footprint and help mitigate the dangerous impacts of climate change.

HB 3409 and HB 3630, named the Climate Resilience Package, invests nearly \$100 million, leveraging ten times that amount in federal funding to strengthen the health and resilience of communities, lands, and local economies. The measure includes aligning energy efficient programs

with Oregon's climate goals, accelerates heat pump deployment, strengthens efforts around weatherizing and retrofitting existing homes, updates state building codes, and improves the efficiency of large commercial buildings. The legislation passed in the last few days of the session in both chambers and now goes to Governor Kotek for her signature.

The JCRC also advocated on behalf of House Bill 2601. This bill would have required the state treasurer to exit from carbon-intensive investments and develop a plan to protect state investments from risks related to climate change. Despite a public hearing, the bill never received a vote and died at adjournment.

Protecting Workers Against Wage Theft

The JCRC believes that every worker has the right to live and labor with dignity, safety and hope. This year, the Northwest Carpenter's Union brought forward HB 2057, addressing wage theft in construction. The JCRC testified that Deuteronomy 24:14-15 states, "You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether of your brethren or one of the aliens who is in your land within your gates. Each day you shall give him his wages and not let the sun go down on it, for he is poor and has set heart on it."

HB 2057 would have placed the burden on companies in charge of construction projects to ensure their subcontractor employees are paid on time. The bill was seen as an important pathway to address the issue of wage theft in the construction industry. Wage theft robs an individual's ability to take care of themselves and their families, and it disproportionately impacts low wage workers, women, people of color, and immigrant workers. Unfortunately, despite strong advocacy until the very end, HB 2057 did not receive the necessary votes to move forward.

Thank You

A special thank you goes out to members of the JCRC's Legislative Advocacy Committee, chaired by Bill Kwitman. Over the course of the 2023 legislative session, volunteers met on a regular basis to discuss positions on legislation important to the Jewish community. They testified in front of committees, wrote numerous emails, met with legislators, and lobbied vigorously on behalf of the Jewish community.