

Jewish Community Relations Council 2024 Legislative End of Session Report

Oregon's 82nd Legislative Assembly adjourned the short session, several days ahead of the 35 days Constitutional requirement. During the session, legislators remained laser focused on several big issues impacting Oregonians, including Housing/Homelessness and Measure 110 reforms. Legislative leadership made it clear that outside of those two big issues, unless there was clear bi-partisan, bi-cameral support on specific legislation, organizations could wait until the 2025 session. This decision was partly because of lack of time (bills needing to move almost every week to stay alive), but also because of a recent Oregon Supreme Court decision that upheld Measure 113 prohibiting legislators from seeking re-election if they had 10 unexcused absences in 2023. Realizing that most of the Republican senators met this threshold, leadership agreed to "play nice," to avoid a potential walkout and legislative shutdown.

The Legislature also received welcome financial news in the beginning of session. The State economists projected that corporate and personal income taxes were up \$130 million from last November, giving them about another \$1.7 billion total unspent from the current two-year budget. This money was much welcomed by Governor Kotek, who asked for \$500 million in additional housing dollars, as well as legislators bringing forth many ideas of spending for their districts.

Security Funding for Jewish Organizations

In the wake of rising antisemitism in Oregon, the JCRC submitted a request for \$530,000 in funding for a variety of different Jewish organizations this legislative session. This money would be allocated for increased security cameras, bullet proof glass, upgraded access control systems, motion detectors, upgraded fencing and other safety measures. Despite positive conversations from legislative leadership and Ways and Means members, the JCRC was informed toward the end of the session that Oregon's Constitution contains the strongest provisions for separation of church and state of any state constitution in the United States, including the Federal Constitution. Oregon Constitution, Article I, section 5, reads:

"No money shall be drawn from the Treasury for the benefit of any religious or theological institution, nor shall any money be appropriated for the payment of any religious service in either house of the Legislative Assembly."

While some of the money requested from the legislature undoubtedly would have gone to several Jewish synagogues, there were other requests from the Mittleman Jewish Community Center and other non-profit organizations serving the general public. Currently, the JCRC is working with the legislature staff to better understand the guidelines and allowances for our partner organizations to receive state dollars in the future.

Housing

On January 10th, 2023, Governor Kotek issued Executive Order 23-02, which declared a state of emergency due to homelessness. This was extended with Executive Order 24-01 on January 9th, 2024, which cited continued increases in homelessness and laid out a timeline of funding and actions taken. At the same time, Governor Kotek issued Executive Order 23-04, which established an annual housing production target of 36,000 homes in Oregon and established the Governor's Housing Production Advisory Council (HPAC).

Senate Bill 1530 is one of two key housing bills this session, allocating \$258 million for the implementation of various state programs. Among a list of other appropriations, some of the largest state investments included: \$100 million for infrastructure projects supporting housing development, \$65 million for emergency shelters, and \$40 million for the Oregon Eviction Diversion and Prevention Rapid Response programs and services administered by culturally responsive organizations.

The second bill, Senate Bill 1537, establishes the Housing Accountability and Production Office (HAPO) and directs HAPO to assist local governments with housing production. The bill contains some controversial language modifying the definition of limited land use decisions and requiring local governments to grant land use regulation and adjustments in certain circumstances. These include allowing cities to undergo either a one-time urban growth boundary amendment or a land exchange in specified conditions.

Both bills passed the House and Senate and are sitting on the Governor's desk. As the chief driver of these issues, Governor Kotek will sign both, most likely in a public signing ceremony.

Measure 110 Reforms

In what started as one of the most divisive issues of the session, how to repeal Measure 110, ended in overwhelmingly bi-partisan support of the Oregon Drug Intervention Plan. Measure 110, a law voters passed in 2020, decriminalized possession of small amounts of hard drugs and incentivized treatment. Largely cited as a reason for public drug use and a cause of increased fentanyl deaths, lawmakers made it a top priority to fix during this short session. The result, after considerable work, public testimony and debate, was House Bill 4002, which would dismantle the decriminalization of a simple drug possession and build something new in its place. While drug recriminalization is the core of HB 4002, there are several other provisions in the lengthy bill. Please use the link below to go to the complete summary of the bill.

<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2024R1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/282969>

Climate Change Action

The JCRC continues to believe 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 protecting state investments from risks related to climate change.

House Bill 4083, the COAL Act, directs the Oregon Investment Council and the State Treasurer to eliminate certain investments in thermal coal companies. Thermal coal investments are rapidly seeing diminishing returns as our country continues to shift away from fossil fuels. This measure is another strategy of the state trying to slow and decrease the extent of climate change while allowing the State Treasurer to remain faithful to his fiduciary responsibility to the PERS retirees. It calls for divestment and reinvestment of monies, “without monetary loss to the funds through reasonable, prudent and productive investments in companies generating returns that are comparable to the returns generated by companies subject to the divestment.” The measure narrowly passed to House and the Senate and now heads to Governor Kotek who is expected to sign it.

Other Issues of Interest

At the request of Ecumenical Ministry of Oregon, the JCRC wrote testimony in support of House Bill 4085. The measure would have allocated \$6 million from the General Fund to the Department of Human Services to provide grants to assist noncitizens to cover costs of immigration legal services or fees. Despite having momentum coming out of the 2023 legislative session, HB 4085 failed to advance out of the Joint Ways and Means Committee this year. Supporters say they plan to bring it back in the long 2025 legislative session.

Finally, the JCRC followed Senate Bill 1583, which prohibits discrimination when selecting textbooks, instructional materials or library books for public schools. More specifically, the measure prevents a school board or school administrator from banning a book when the content includes a perspective, study, or story of or is created by any individual/group against whom discrimination is prohibited. The bill initially passed both the Senate and the House, but a late amendment prevented it from receiving final approval.