

Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland Final 2025 Legislative Report

Overview

The 2025 Oregon legislative session adjourned on Friday, June 27, two days before the 160-day constitutional deadline. Like most sessions, there was both a mix of significant accomplishments, as well as some serious failures. Also, after years of steady economic growth in Oregon and a positive early March forecast, lawmakers learned in May that they would have approximately half a billion dollars less in revenue than previously expected. This was largely due to economic uncertainties related to federal policy changes, creating a “sluggish period of economic growth,” according to the state economist. The drop in revenue didn’t seriously change Governor Kotek’s recommendations to continuing service levels for state agencies, but it did put a serious damper on new funding opportunities late in the session. Notably, the co-chairs of the Joint Ways and Means Committee quickly lowered expectations for funding requests, stating that they had \$1.5 billion more in requests than they did in money to appropriate.

The Jewish Community Relations Council’s legislative agenda also had successes and missed opportunities. A major disappointment was not receiving money for non-profit security funding and a much-needed transportation package (some portions of which the JCRC supported). However, the news was better on other priorities: provider taxes (that fund Medicaid), wage theft, gun violence, and climate change all made it to the Governor’s desk. The JCRC also defeated efforts to allow teachers in public schools to use Gaza as an example of “genocide.”

Additionally, in a first for the JCRC this session, we held our own Jewish Lobby Day in February. Fifteen members of the Portland and Eugene Jewish communities came for a full day in Salem, meeting with legislative leadership, Ways and Means members, and their own legislators to discuss a variety of issues on the JCRC’s legislative agenda. These meetings were well received, and we look forward to arranging similar lobby days in future sessions.

Security Funding for Nonprofit Organizations

In the wake of rising antisemitism in Oregon as well as nationally, the JCRC submitted a request for \$530,000 in funding for a variety of different Jewish organizations in the 2023 legislative session. This money would have been allocated for increased security cameras, bullet-proof glass, upgraded access control systems, motion detectors, improved fencing, and other safety measures. Unfortunately, this effort was unsuccessful due to Oregon’s constitutional limitations with respect to the separation of church and state.

In 2025, the JCRC took a different approach. We joined the Oregon Coalition for Nonprofit Safety (OCNS) to introduce Senate Bill 939, which would have allocated five million dollars to the Oregon Office of Emergency Management for grants to nonprofits facing potential risk of targeted violence. Many members of our community and synagogue leaders spent countless hours engaging with legislators, testifying, and providing important information about the

challenges our organizations face. With no opposition, the bill passed unanimously out of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

At the end of the session, however, we learned this funding package would not be included in the final budget bills of the session. We lobbied through the last days of the session hoping the Ways and Means co-chairs and legislative leadership would fund the program, even at a lesser amount, but unfortunately that did not happen. We anticipate this will be an interim discussion moving forward with the potential of coming back in the 2026 session.

Protection of Social Safety Net Programs

The JCRC supports the safeguarding of funds for Oregon's most vulnerable populations. This includes advocating for the protection of Medicaid, programs for people with disabilities, and resources for behavioral and substance abuse services. Oregon's Medicaid program provides low-income families, adults, children, and some seniors with no-cost comprehensive health care coverage. Approximately one in three Oregonians and one in two children rely on Medicaid.

One of the most important bills this session for Medicaid was House Bill 2010, which keeps provider taxes in place and extends the assessment on hospitals, earnings from health plan premiums, and payments by the Oregon Health Authority to managed care organizations. When allowed by the federal government (as they are currently), these programs provide substantial matching funds and contribute to the state's share of the Medicaid program. This is a significant investment for communities across the state and provides access to health care coverage for vulnerable Oregonians.

The JCRC provided testimony in support of HB 2010, which early on passed both the House and Senate with bipartisan support and was one of the first bills of the 2025 session signed into law by Governor Kotek.

Housing and Homelessness

On January 10, 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 9, 2024, which cited continued increases in homelessness (over 11,000 in Multnomah County alone) and laid out a timeline of funding and actions to be taken.

The JCRC strongly shares the governor's belief that housing and homelessness need to be addressed in an urgent manner and is committed to supporting the Governor's housing agenda. In the 2025 session, the governor successfully worked with the legislature to make sure the statewide shelter system did not lose support and would continue to serve Oregon communities. House Bill 3644 invested \$204.9 million to keep all housing shelters open.

Shelters, while necessary, are not sufficient in addressing homelessness. Governor Kotek and legislators made significant investments in rehousing and long-term rental assistance, with \$137.7 million dedicated to these programs, attempting to prevent people from returning to the

streets. Finally, this session lawmakers worked to secure \$100 million for affordable housing and \$545 for permanent supportive housing units.

The JCRC remains supportive of these efforts but also understands there is more work to be done, *including more investment in behavioral health and substance abuse services that must go hand-in-hand with shelter options.*

Preventing Gun Violence and Measure 114

The JCRC advocates for common sense gun violence prevention legislation. Early in session, Democratic legislators in the House and Senate introduced a package of gun-related bills. Several had hearings, others were swept under the rug never to be heard again, and the package was eventually narrowed down to three bills.

In the end, only Senate Bill 243 passed the legislature in the waning days of June on a party-line vote. SB 243, now known as the Community Safety Firearms Act, includes the following provisions: defines rapid fire activators (commonly referred to as “bump stock” accessories that turn semiautomatic rifles into machine guns) and creates a crime for the unlawful possession of them; authorizes governing bodies of specified public entities to adopt policy, ordinances, or regulations restricting the carrying of firearms within their building; and updates provisions related to Ballot Measure 114 (approved by voters in 2022 to reduce gun violence). The bill now goes to Governor Kotek who is expected to sign it.

Climate Change Action and Transportation

The JCRC believes that climate change is an urgent global security threat and one of the greatest moral issues of our time. The JCRC’s Climate Action Committee is a member of Divest Oregon, whose goal is for the State Treasury to end new investment in the fossil fuel industry, phase out existing fossil fuel investments over time and reinvest in a sustainable future. As part of this coalition, the JCRC supported House Bill 2081, the Climate Resilience Investment Act, directing the Oregon State Treasury to pursue clean energy investment opportunities and build a more climate resilient fund. This bill was introduced several sessions ago, and we are happy to see it finally pass the legislature (with State Treasurer Elizabeth Steiner’s help and commitment) and be signed by Governor Kotek.

One of the session’s biggest challenges, and probably its biggest failure, was the Oregon transportation package. Early in session, the JCRC’s Climate Action Committee supported efforts to pass an updated plan, specifically with a focus on transportation impacts to Oregonians. For background, the Oregon Department of Transportation projected a revenue shortfall of more than \$354 million in 2025-2027. This potentially could lead to laying off 1,000 employees, not to mention ODOT not having the ability to repair crumbling roads and unsafe bridges or improving emergency response times.

At the same time, the primary source of road funding, the gas tax, is declining as we use more fuel-efficient vehicles, electric vehicles (ODOT recently celebrated 100,000 electric vehicle registrations) or do our shopping remotely. Ultimately, the choice for the legislature was coming

up with more money (an increase in the gas tax, registration fees, title fees, etc.) or by making cuts, producing layoffs and prioritizing which roads are closed or fixed. Unfortunately, due to politics, last-minute disagreements and timing, the legislature chose the latter. With two days left before their constitutionally required time to adjourn, legislators decided to walk away without a transportation package, rather than commit to getting something through.

Wage Theft Legislation

The JCRC believes that every worker has the right to live and work with dignity and safety and over the last few sessions it has been actively involved in various attempts to prevent wage theft.

In 2025, the JCRC testified in support of Senate Bill 426. The bill establishes that an owner and the direct contractor that sign a construction contract are jointly and severally liable in a civil action for unpaid wages to an unrepresented employee of the direct contractor and subcontractor. According to testimony during the hearing, construction ranks second statewide for wage theft claims relative to workforce size. Federal and state enforcement agencies consistently uncover cases where unscrupulous contractors deprive workers of rightful wages, overtime pay, and benefits.

In testimony, the JCRC noted, “Wage theft and labor exploitation undermine honest contractors who must compete with contractors who hire wage thieves as subs, allowing them to underbid those jobs. The impacts extend well beyond the construction industry, by consigning the families of such exploited workers to an already overburdened safety net supported by taxpayer dollars, thus adding to the state’s workforce and housing crises.”

SB 426 passed both chambers on slim margins and was signed into law by Governor Kotek the first week of June.

Thank You

A special thank you to members of the Legislative Advocacy Committee, the Climate Change Action Committee, and members of the Portland and Lane County JCRCs who came to Salem to meet with legislators, provided testimony, and wrote and submitted letters on behalf of our agenda.