



Jacquelyn Martin/Associated Press

Stephen Roberts, with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, holds up a sign during a rally outside of the Supreme Court in February.

## Despite legal threat, union membership rises

By PARIS ACHEN  
Capital Bureau

Oregon's public sector labor unions are bracing for an unfavorable ruling from the U.S. Supreme Court on a case that could strike down mandatory public sector union dues that support collective bargaining here and in other states.

But if a similar court ruling in 2014 is any indication, any lost revenue from the change in interpretation of the law could be only temporary.

"There is no way this (ruling) will not impact us, but there is a lot of proof that shows workers will come together to have a voice to make their jobs better and their communities better," said Melissa Unger, executive director of Service Employees International Union Local 503.

Justices are scheduled to rule by the end of June on the case of Mark Janus, an Illinois child support specialist, who claims that the mandatory fees violate his First Amendment right to free speech.

With the addition of conservative Justice Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court last year, a reversal of existing case law appears likely, according to legal experts.

## Two public meetings set on statewide housing plan

By PARIS ACHEN  
Capital Bureau

Oregon Housing and Community Services is scheduled to hear from the public this month on a long-awaited comprehensive plan laying out housing availability and ways to address housing needs in the state.

The agency has scheduled two public informational meetings June 14 in Eugene and June 28 in Salem and an online webinar June 12 on the Statewide Housing Plan.

The state housing agency was called out in an audit by the Oregon Secretary of State's Office in December 2016 for failing to provide a statewide housing plan and statewide affordable housing inventory. Both are critical to adequately and strategically addressing the state's affordable housing shortage.

The housing plan became an "overarching priority" when Margaret Salazar took over the agency in the midst of the audit.

The agency hired Portland-based Enviroissues and EcoNorthwest to help develop the plan, which is due in late 2018 or early 2019.

The plan will articulate the "extent of Oregon's housing problem and what can be done to address it," according to state informational materials.

State lawmakers often ask for proof of a clear need when asked to boost funding for affordable housing projects.

The Oregon Office of Economic Analysis has repeatedly reported that construction is tens of thousands of housing units behind growth in the state's population, which is caused largely by new residents moving into the state.

In Portland, tent cities under major bridges have become commonplace.

# Investigation targets Oregon 'sanctuary state' repeal effort

### State has oldest sanctuary law in the nation

By TOM JAMES  
Associated Press

SALEM — A conservative group is taking aim at the nation's oldest statewide sanctuary law, with a drive to repeal a 31-year-old Oregon mandate limiting police coordination on immigration arrests.

But critics say hate groups are funding the effort to abolish the law, and allege paid signature-gatherers deceived voters during a canvassing push earlier this year.

State law enforcement authorities have opened at least one investigation into the signature-gatherers, and opponents have filed a complaint questioning whether the behavior was part of a coordinated effort to mislead voters.

Representatives for the group behind the petition, the Repeal Oregon Sanctuary Law Committee, did not respond to calls or emails seeking comment.

The developments come as so-called sanctuary laws around the United States face increasing criticism from President Donald Trump's administration. Trump last month gathered officials opposed to a California sanctuary law at a Washington, D.C., event where he gained attention for referring

to violent gang members who enter the country illegally as "animals."

Like California, Oregon has a sanctuary law that covers the entire state, the first of its kind and one of only a handful of similarly broad laws in the nation.

With help from anti-sanctuary groups, a trio of Republican state legislators from rural parts of the state sponsored an initiative to repeal Oregon's law.

The secretary of state's office confirmed nine complaints about alleged deceptive practices by initiative signature-gatherers have been forwarded to Oregon's Justice Department for criminal investigation. State elections staff also estimated about 40 people called seeking to have their signatures removed from the petition.

Many of the complaints date to late February, but Kristina Edmunson, the Justice Department's communications head, said the agency has since received a second round of complaints. Edmunson wouldn't comment on

whether that prompted additional investigations.

Portland resident Erin Whitlock was among those who complained.

Whitlock told The Associated Press she was approached on a commuter train by a canvasser who described the measure to passengers as extending protections for immigrants in the country illegally — which she knew to be the opposite of its actual effect.

"Everything felt a little fishy," said Whitlock, who added the canvasser would not show her a copy of the petition. Oregon canvassers are required to carry copies.

In another case, a video featured in media reports appeared to show a canvasser reacting with surprise when told the effect of the initiative.

Lee Vasche, owner of the signature-gathering company named in the complaint, said he hadn't heard of a complaint like Whitlock's but acknowledged complaints about misrepresentation in general.

Most were the fault of one signature-gatherer,

Vasche said, adding the company fired two other circulators and destroyed about 400 signatures.

"We owned up to that, destroyed them, and moved on," Vasche said.

But a group opposing the initiative has filed a separate official complaint over the episodes, asking the Justice Department to investigate whether they amount to election racketeering.

In their complaint, attorneys for advocate group Our Oregon cite the similarity of the complaints.

"It is difficult to imagine a scenario" where Vasche didn't know what was happening, the complaint reads.

Vasche denied the allegation, and said he also responded to the complaints by adding training.

The group gathered about 20,000 signatures but stopped working on the petition at the beginning of March, said Vasche, citing hostility to the proposal in metro areas and a boycott of his company, which does other political work.

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