



# Black History Month



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Committed to Cultural Diversity



Sen. Lew Frederick, D-Portland

## Black Voices Grow Power in Salem Frederick leads most diverse group of lawmakers

BY BEVERLY CORBELL  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

The Legislative session currently underway at the State Capitol in Salem is historically important this year with its growing number of elected lawmakers of color giving focus to issues long supported by the Black community, says Sen. Lew Frederick, the Legislature's most senior Black lawmaker and a long time civil rights activist.

"To some extent, Black history is key to what's going on now," Frederick said, in an interview with the Portland Observer. "The murder of George Floyd and issues related to the COVID virus have made a big difference. We have focused our attention on the disparity that the black community has had for centuries," he said. "It's no longer something someone made up, a chip on your shoulder. People have seen what's going on and what's taken place."

This year, several new bills, many with racial impacts, have been introduced to address education, police accountability, housing, science, agriculture, basic civil rights and more.

Frederick, a former Portland Public Schools communications leader and television journalist, is chief sponsor of 55 bills this session, including 18 on education, 12 on criminal justice, four concerning mental

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Multnomah County District Attorney Mike Schmidt, in his first year of office after being elected on a platform to address racial disparities in prosecutions and police accountability, defends new policies promoting fairness and equity.

## Elevating Justice in Portland New DA defends policies; says Black lives matter

BY BEVERLY CORBELL  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Multnomah County District Attorney Mike Schmidt was elected as a racial justice reformer last May, just a week before the death of George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis. He started the job early, in August, when the current officer holder stepped down. The top law enforcement official in the county has had his hands full ever since.

Nationwide demonstrations and social unrest were more than pronounced in Portland this summer following Floyd's death, putting a spotlight on the city as massive demonstrations gathered, night after night, protesting police violence and other racial impacts in the criminal justice system.

Schmidt ran a platform to address racial disparities in prosecutions and police accountability, but has come under criticism for letting some protesters arrested for non-violent offenses get "off easy." He has defended the civil rights of peaceful protesters, saying they delivered a lesson to law enforcement and the public that should have been learned decades ago: That black lives matter.

"They matter even when the movement for racial justice drifts from the daily news cycle. They matter when we're distracted," Schmidt said in a recent speech. "They

matter when those of us with power to do that hard work of making them matter. I will carry with me those values that those words represent every day of my administration."

As DA, Schmidt is charged with prosecuting crimes, but he says the criminal justice system has adhered to many wrong policies, like mandatory sentencing, the war on drugs, its effects on people living in poverty, and those with addictions.

To correct those policies, Schmidt has pledged to form a Conviction Integrity Unit in his office, to look at the effects of the criminal justice system after conviction and sentencing.

"Everybody knows that justice doesn't end there," he said in an interview with the Portland Observer. "There is justice for victims, but also for the person prosecuted."

Even after a person convicted of a crime has served his or her time, there are many barriers to fully re-entering society, Schmidt said.

"We can help with reducing barriers, like forgiveness of fines and fees that trap people in cycles of poverty. We really need to move forward and help families," he said.

In keeping with his belief that black lives matter,

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