

Hate: New Oregon law seeks to improve hate crime reporting

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state report no hate crimes while others appear to be hotbeds.

“It’s fair to say that the cities that report zero hate crimes are overlooking the incidents,” said Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum.

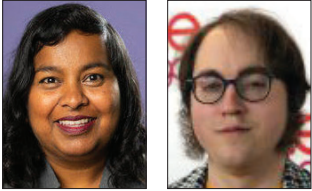
The new law seeks to change that. Earlier this year, the Oregon Legislature passed the first update to the state’s hate crimes law in decades. Senate Bill 577 broadened the law to include crimes against people over their sexual orientation or gender identity while stiffening penalties in other situations.

The new law also directs the Oregon District Attorneys Association and the Oregon State Police to develop a standard for recording data on hate crimes and other incidents that’ll be used across the state.

Law enforcement officials and advocacy groups hope the data will provide a more complete picture of hate in Oregon, allowing them to develop a more targeted response while providing better support for victims.

Rosenblum said she’s not aware of any other state taking such a comprehensive approach. She said the work implementing the law is being overseen by a 20-person steering committee that includes representatives from law enforcement, prosecutors, lawmakers, minority advocacy groups and others.

“There is some trust being built between all the players, and new systems aren’t always easy to institute,” said Nancy Haque, the executive director of Basic Rights Oregon, whose group was involved with the task force and legislation. “But people are going into the process earnestly. And I actually



Haque Riley

think it’s going to be a model program.”

New look at old problem

Oregon’s hate crimes law was enacted in the 1980s in response to prevalent white supremacist gangs. In recent years, defendants in two high-profile, racially motivated attacks were given lesser charges because they acted alone, prompting a new look at the law. The attorney general convened a task force in March 2018 to consider updating the law.

Rosenblum said the task force heard from victims and people afraid to walk into their own synagogue.

“The theme was that people didn’t really feel like they had anywhere to turn,” she said.

The new law directs the state Justice Department to set up a “hate crimes hotline” that’ll collect data.

Haque said the hotline would be “game-changing,” providing a uniform way of reporting incidents across the state while connecting victims to resources.

Haque said having more complete data would reveal upticks in hate crimes and help advocacy groups and law enforcement respond. She pointed to earlier this year when reports emerged on social media of harassment and violence against LGBTQ individuals in Portland.

She said she called the city and found out none of the incidents had been reported to police. She said she was reluctant to comment on the episodes when media called.



EO Media Group Photo

Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum said she’s not aware of any other state taking such a comprehensive approach to hate crimes. A new law passed earlier this year currently being implemented by prosecutors, police and others could shed light on the breadth of hate in Oregon and result in a broader response.

“I didn’t have a feeling of being able to say for sure, ‘Watch out everyone, hate crimes are happening,’” said Haque. “Because it could terrify people.”

Andrew Riley, policy and communications associate for social justice group Unite Oregon, said the law could better record incidents in rural areas and allow for “apples to apples” comparisons of jurisdictions. But the current data doesn’t allow that.

The FBI compiles statistics on hate crimes annually from data submitted by universities, tribal governments and local police. A total of 7,175 incidents nationwide were reported to the FBI in 2017. But the number is likely an undercount.

For the same year, the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated there were

197,700 reported and non-reported bias-motivated incidents.

In Oregon, only 29 agencies submitted reports for the FBI’s most recent compilation. The most recent numbers included 146 incidents in the state for 2017, a 40% increase from 2016. Cities including Bend, Medford, Roseburg and Grants Pass didn’t report any hate crimes.

Eugene, a city of over 168,000, accounted for nearly half of the state’s incidents.

Lessons from Eugene

Rosenblum said Eugene isn’t necessarily a hotbed of hate and the high number of reported crimes could be because of the city’s strong reporting system.

“We have a larger umbrella for capturing what’s going on in the community,” said Fabio

Andrade, human rights and equity analyst at the city of Eugene.

He said the city’s Office of Human Rights and Neighborhood Involvement works with the police and the several community organizations to track hate crimes as well as incidents involving bias that don’t rise to criminal activity. He said the “most important thing” is that people feel comfortable reporting and the city follows up with victims to direct them to support services.

Similar to Eugene, Oregon’s updated hate crimes law recognizes “bias incidents,” which don’t rise to the level of a criminal case but involve someone directing hostility toward someone over their race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation or other protected categories. Data on reported bias incidents will be analyzed by the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission.

Haque said such data could be useful. She pointed to how Jeremy Christian, who is accused of fatally stabbing two passengers on a MAX train after confronting two black teenagers, had been in early altercations.

Rosenblum said her task force heard from people who said these incidents can be traumatic and they want a response.

She said people now can report bias incidents to the hotline, which will be answered by volunteers. She said staff will follow up with a “culturally competent response” that could include referral to local victims services, such as counseling. The law directs the hotline’s coordinator to develop training for community groups and service providers to assist victims.

“The most important part is to get people who are vic-

tics to report,” she said.

Andrade said Eugene police have liaisons to minority communities to help build trust. Officers are trained to recognize hate crimes, such as racist graffiti, he said.

Oregon’s new law does not specify new training for police. But Eriks Gabliks, director of the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training, said in an email the 16-week basic police course covers hate crimes law and how to investigate them.

‘A clearer picture’

Currently, the Oregon District Attorneys Association and the state police are developing a standard method to gather data on investigations, arrests, prosecutions and sentencing related to hate crimes.

Jeff Howes, a prosecutor and first assistant to the district attorney in the Multnomah County District Attorney’s Office, said that Benton, Lane and Multnomah counties will launch a one-year pilot program in July next year to test the new system before it goes statewide.

“We are going to get a clearer picture, I think, of how prosecutors view bias crimes, what they can prove, what they can’t prove and what they do with that,” he said.

He said improved data will show when prosecutors could and couldn’t sustain hate crime charges, as well as when they’re being referred by police for prosecution. He said it will also communicate to the public that law enforcement takes the issue seriously.

The Criminal Justice Commission won’t report findings to the Legislature until July 2021. Advocates like Haque are optimistic.

“I’m as excited as someone can be talking about awful things,” she said.

Roads: 85% of respondents support a ticket fee for city events

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to town or hurt event attendance, further hurting the hotels, restaurants, and retailers that rely on the tourism dollars these events bring.

“I enthusiastically encourage you to find a solution to the challenge of street repair funding,” he said. “I would also encourage you to look to sources other than taxing a portion of our economy that returns so much to Pendleton and supports local businesses.”

In an interview Wednesday, Beard didn’t want to comment extensively on the letter because of his position with the city. But he said small nonprofit events with modest ticket prices like the Altrusa Bazaar could see their ticket costs rise precipitously due to the fee.

But the ticket fee has its own backers, including some on the city council.

Jake Cambier not only sits on the city council, but also serves on the Pendleton Convention Center Commission, an advisory body that makes recommendations to the council on convention center issues.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Signs advertising various amenities line the side of Nye Avenue in Pendleton on Thursday afternoon. The city of Pendleton is considering the application of taxes on hotels, restaurants or gas as a way of generating revenue to fund street repair.

Cambier said he disagreed with Beard, arguing that a ticket fee could be a way to

raise revenue for streets without hurting low and fixed-income residents.

He added that the council could exempt community events like the Altrusa

Bazaar from the fee, while focusing their efforts on the city’s largest events. Cambier said a \$2 fee wouldn’t be felt much by a consumer plunking down \$70 for the rodeo.

The city hopes several new sources of revenue, like a potential ticket fee, could be combined to raise \$1 million. Combined with the existing \$1.2 million road maintenance budget, the city expects it can begin to improve a crumbling street system.

To gauge what residents want, the council has been distributing a list of proposals to community groups and the general public.

Besides demonstrating which taxing methods were popular, the preliminary survey results also showed that an income tax, a tax on employees who work in Pendleton, and a payroll tax, a tax on all Pendleton employers, garnered little support.

Of those who supported the gas tax, more than 1-in-3 survey takers said that it should be 4 cents per gallon. An overwhelming majority of respondents favored a \$2 price point for the ticket fee.

The council wants to chart a path for road funding by the end of the year, but before they do that, they plan to meet face to face with one of the groups that could be affected by the new taxes and fees.

Mayor John Turner said the council will meet Tuesday to discuss the proposals with hoteliers and event promoters.

Turner said the meeting is being organized to hear these groups’ concerns rather than trying to convince them that these taxes and fees are worthwhile.

Whichever sources of revenue the city pursues, it could spur an organized campaign against them.

After the council put a 5-cent gas tax proposal on the ballot in 2015, a political action committee affiliated with the Oregon Fuels Association spent thousands of dollars to defeat the measure.

Once all the ballots were counted, nearly two out of three Pendleton voters voted against the gas tax.

The council workshop will be held Tuesday at 7 p.m. at the council chambers in city hall, 500 S.W. Dorion Ave.

Head Start: State funding could have Head Start seeking more qualified staff

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open positions were left in their wake.

McGrath also noted the layoffs at Hinkle Railroad in Hermiston this past May saw the families of some employees leaving the area for different jobs.

This September, because of the number of open positions, the organization began early learning classes at some facilities a few weeks later than usual.

“We have a great team that is so willing to jump (through) hoops,” said Myrna Valdez, human resources director at the organization.

Head Start programs are federally and state funded nonprofit organizations that

provide early childhood education and other resources to low-income families. The Umatilla Morrow County Head Start is headquartered in Umatilla County. Last year, according to their annual report, their services reached more than 9,000 children and families.

And according to McGrath, these numbers could keep expanding thanks to state funding that she described as “legendary.”

Part of the billion-dollar Student Success Act signed into law by Gov. Kate Brown this year set aside \$44 million for Head Start programs, and \$22 million for Early Head Start, among other multimillion investments in

early education.

“It was a historical moment,” McGrath said.

But with that moment, she said, could come the need for more qualified staff members for Head Start programs across Oregon.

For Cay-Uma-Wa Head Start, a preschool program on the Umatilla Indian Reservation, it could also mean access to funds from the \$20 million Early Childhood Equity Fund, which passed along with the Student Success Act, for culturally specific early learning.

“We’re looking to strengthen our program, hopefully that fund can help our community,” said Lloyd Commander, director for Cay-Uma-Wa Head Start.

Commander said finding

quality candidates for child care and early learning jobs can be difficult.

He said over the past few years, the Cay-Um-Wa — which serves 40 children and has eight positions — has seen some turnover, and it’s difficult to find people with the right licensure or educational background. But currently, they only have one more spot they’re trying to fill.

“Last year, they decided to turn to more ‘grow your own,’” he said. “We’ll have someone who doesn’t have those certifications and help them start their certification, so they can be qualified.”

It’s a problem that exists across the board.

“There’s a tricky balance

right now. Early childhood education providers are the lowest paid teachers,” Robert Kleng, director of Eastern Oregon University Head Start said.

As far as open job listings go, there aren’t many in the early education sector unrelated to Head Start or other public programs. According to a study from OSU earlier this year, more than 50% of preschool-age child care spots are publicly funded.

On the UMCHS website, an open position for a preschool teacher in Pendleton offers \$14.77 an hour and requires an Early Childhood Education Certificate or Child Development Associate Certificate, CPR certification and a year of experience in a preschool-related program. It lists an associates degree in Early Childhood Education or a similar field as preferred.

“We need teachers. We need folks that are passionate about little kids and getting degrees that will give them the high capacity to do that. We’ll finally pay them what they deserve,” Kleng said.

McGrath expressed hope that the state funding would see more early educators getting paid more competitively.

“There’s an attempt to professionalize the field. Sometimes finding the heart and the qualifications, that’s a tall order,” she said. “These are careers that Oregon is saying are vital.”