

'Ezra's Law' would stiffen penalties for causing permanent injury

By GARRETT ANDREWS
EO Media Group

BEND — Abusers who cause their victims permanent physical injuries could serve an automatic 25-year prison term in Oregon under a proposed law announced Monday in Madras.

Three victims with severe injuries, their families and supporters crowded into the lobby of the Jefferson County Courthouse to hear District Attorney Steve LeRiche announce "Ezra's Law."

"I think all of us want to see the narrative change, from a narrative where criminals are put first and victims are forgotten," he said. "Today, you see three people and their families who have a sentence they can't look forward to completing. Their sentence is for their entire life."

LeRiche said these cases are rare in his jurisdiction — one about every one to five years — and therefore deserve a rare penalty.

"As a society I hope we embrace people who have been offended in crimes and their lives altered in this way, and we put them first, and we take care of them first before anyone else," he said.



Ezra Jerome Thomas, 4, appeared with relatives at the Jefferson County Courthouse on Monday to hear District Attorney Steve LeRiche announce a proposed state law named in the boy's honor. Ezra was severely injured by his mom's boyfriend, Josue Jair Mendoza-Melo, who was sentenced to 12 years in prison.

EO Media Group Photo/Garrett Andrews

The bill would work by allowing judges to determine if a permanent injury has resulted from a crime against a person. "Perma-

nent physical injury" is defined in the statute as "permanently and significantly impairing a person's cognitive function,

vision or hearing or ability to walk, eat, breathe or move the person's limbs." If such a determination is made, the assumed sen-

tence under the law would be 25 years, and judges could make exceptions for lighter sentences.

LeRiche said the law would have likely applied in two cases in the past seven years. Those two victims were in attendance.

Jessica Haynes, 29, used a cane to walk to her seat. She recently learned to walk again after an ex-boyfriend shot her in the head in 2013.

That man, Thomas Knapp, received a sentence of five years and eight months.

"It has affected me so much, and not just me, it's affected my family so much," she said.

Knapp is scheduled to be released from prison in May 2021.

The bill's namesake, Ezra Jerome Thomas, was also there. His mom and grandmother told *The Bulletin* his health has improved since he appeared at the sentencing of the man who injured him, Josue Jair Mendoza-Melo.

Mendoza-Melo was 21 when a judge assigned him 12 years in prison but with the possibility of getting out a few years early.

Last session, a bill similar to Ezra's Law sponsored by Sen. Sara Gelser was

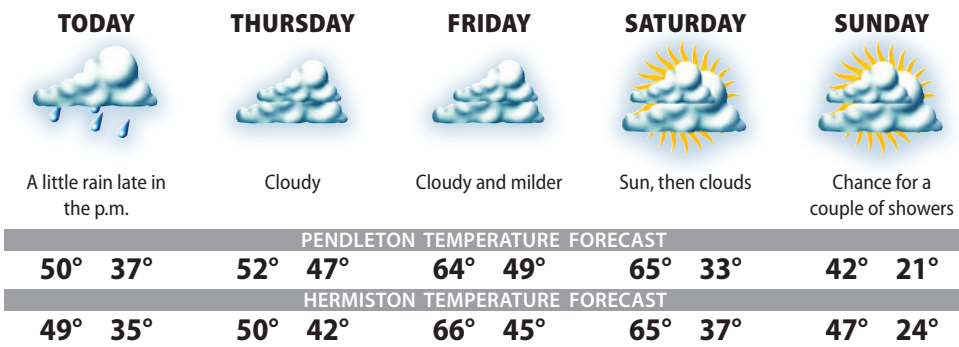
unsuccessful. But LeRiche thinks tweaks and added specifics as well as its bipartisan sponsors, Daniel Bonham, R-The Dalles, and Rep. Carla Piluso, D-Gresham, will improve the bill's chance of success. Oregon's short legislative session starts Monday.

"We've got Daniel Bonham on our side this time," LeRiche said to applause. "And maybe more importantly, we got Tina (Jorgenson) and we got Liz (Crouch), and we have Jessica, and their story has been heard in Salem. And maybe when they see real people who are affected and hurt, and their lives altered forever, maybe they'll feel the empathy that all of us feel for them, as well."

Jorgenson is Ezra's grandmother and guardian, and Crouch is Roy Fast's grandmother and guardian. Jorgenson and Crouch met on the internet when the bill was being developed, and grew close sharing stories about their grandsons. Fast, now 7, was abused when he was 6 months old and diagnosed with shaken baby syndrome.

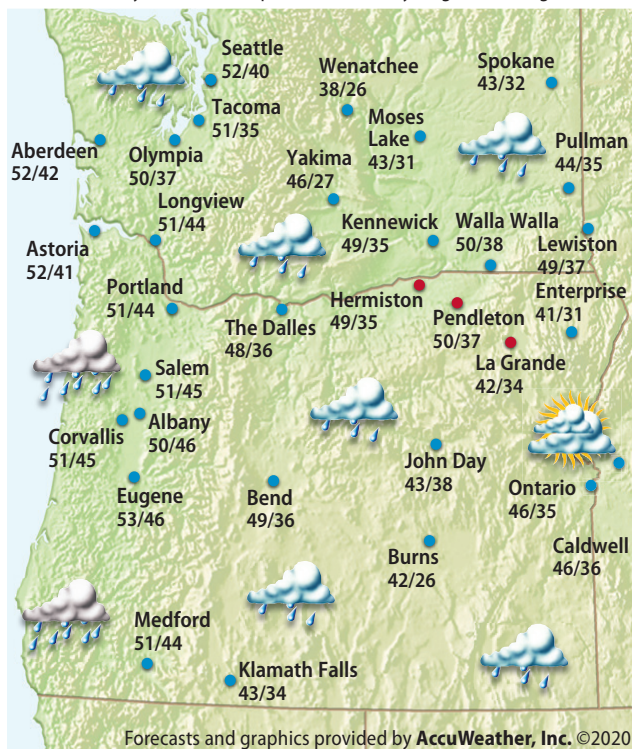
Crouch said she burst into tears Monday when she finally met her counterpart in person.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	53°	42°
Normals	43°	28°
Records	67° (1931)	-14° (1957)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.21"
Month to date	1.86"
Normal month to date	1.28"
Year to date	1.86"
Last year to date	2.07"
Normal year to date	1.28"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	57°	38°
Normals	44°	29°
Records	61° (1984)	-21° (1957)

PRECIPITATION

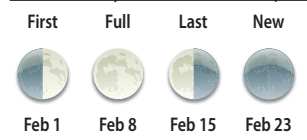
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.02"
Month to date	0.24"
Normal month to date	1.16"
Year to date	0.24"
Last year to date	1.53"
Normal year to date	1.16"

WINDS (in mph)

	Today	Thu.
Boardman	SSW 4-8	NNE 3-6
Pendleton	S 6-12	SE 4-8

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today	7:21 a.m.
Sunset tonight	4:56 p.m.
Moonrise today	9:56 a.m.
Moonset today	9:55 p.m.



Washington bill likens salmon to 4th branch of government

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Tribal treaty rights make salmon akin to a fourth branch of government in Washington, and fish recovery should guide farming near water, and rural and economic development, according to a bill introduced by Democratic state Rep. Debra Lekanoff.

Lekanoff said builders, cities and counties should follow federal court decisions that guaranteed Western Washington tribes access to fish and that ordered the state to remove culverts that block spawning grounds.

"We are not looking to hinder growth," said Lekanoff, who represents portions of Whatcom, Skagit and San Juan counties in Northwest Washington and is also the government affairs director for the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community.

"We're looking to be able to work with those builders, work with those cities

and counties, and to do it in a manner that adheres to the Boldt decision and adheres to the culvert decision," she said.

The 1974 Boldt decision awarded treaty tribes 50% of the annual fish harvest. The state is under a federal court order to remove hundreds of fish-impeding culverts. The Boldt decision and culvert court order stem from a long-running lawsuit between the state and federal government over the scope of treaties signed in 1854 and 1855.

Lekanoff's proposal, House Bill 2549, would amend the state's Growth Management Act and make salmon recovery a priority for local governments. Any harm to fish caused by development would have to be outweighed by fish projects, according to the bill.

The standard — called "net ecological benefit" — would go a step beyond requirements to not hurt fish. The higher standard also would apply to the Voluntary Stewardship Program, a conserva-

tion initiative championed by the Washington Farm Bureau and embraced by some counties to help farmers preserve fish and wildlife habitat without being regulated off the land.

Tribes and environmental groups have endorsed Lekanoff's bill. The Farm Bureau, Washington State Dairy Federation, the Washington Association of Wheat Growers and the Washington Potato and Onion Association formally opposed the bill at a House environment committee hearing Monday.

Farm Bureau Director of Government Relations Tom Davis said the definition of "net ecological benefit" was too vague. "That frankly scares us to death," he said.

The GMA requires local governments to plan for transportation, housing and industrial development, while curbing urban sprawl and preserving farmland. HB 2549 would add a "salmon and steelhead protection and recovery element."

BRIEFLY

CO leak at vacation rental sends 25 to hospital

DONNELLY, Idaho — Authorities say 25 people were hospitalized for carbon monoxide poisoning while staying at a vacation rental home in an Idaho mountain town.

Donnelly Rural Fire Protection Chief Juan Bonilla says firefighters were called to the vacation home in Donnelly about 6:30 a.m. Monday, where they found the occupants complaining of headaches and nausea.

Two adults and two children were initially taken by ambulance to a hospital in McCall. Once health care workers realized

they had symptoms consistent with carbon monoxide poisoning, fire crews tested the air in the home and found carbon monoxide levels that were above normal, Bonilla said.

That's when the other 21 residents were taken to the hospital as well. Officials say 21 of the people staying at the home have since been treated and released.

St. Luke's Hospital spokeswoman Laura Crawford said the other four were transferred to Boise-area hospitals for specialized treatment in hyperbaric chambers. The chambers use high-flow oxygen to help clean the carbon monoxide from a patient's system, Crawford said.

— Associated Press

CORRECTIONS: In the Page A2 story "Women claim first two places at Eagle Cap Extreme," published Tuesday, Jan. 28, the story misspelled the name of Gabe Dunham, the first-place finisher in the 200-mile race.

In the Page A5 story "Church Women United meet Jan. 31," published Friday, Jan. 24, the incorrect date was given for the meeting, which will be held Thursday, Jan. 30.

The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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