

Social Policy

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By Marge Easley, Bill Walsh, Nancy Donovan, Karen Nibler and Debbie Aiona, Social Policy Portfolio

Criminal Justice Reform (Barbara Ross)

The Senate Judiciary Committee got underway at 8:30 on Jan 21 with an overview of the Oregon Court system and the introduction of a set of non-controversial LC's.

Chair Senator Prozanski told me that his top priority for the session will be a modification of Measure 11. He wants judges to have more flexibility in determining the length of sentences. The current practice is for most criminal cases involving mandatory sentences under Measure 11 to be settled by plea bargaining, with the result being that the assistant district attorney who handles the case gets to decide on the length of the sentence. This change will require a 2/3s vote and some other members of the committee believe it will be difficult to get approval for this concept.

Senator Dembrow, a long term member of the committee, is focusing on improving access to higher ed classes inside prisons. Recently regulations have changed allowing inmates to receive Pell Grants

from the federal government. Dembrow wants to improve the coordination of universities offering courses inside prisons so it is easier to enroll in classes that lead to a degree or certificate that would increase the prisoner's chances to find employment when they are released.

Dembrow also expects to introduce legislation to facilitate the expungement of Juvenile records for lower level offences. This bill was on its way to passage in the last short session when a group of Republicans cut short all progress by walking out. The League was a strong supporter of this program, so we are hopeful it will pass with bipartisan support.

Most bills related to police reform are expected to be handled in the House Judiciary Committee.

Gun Safety (Marge Easley)

A number of gun safety concepts are returning this year, and it is hoped that the increase in gun violence in Oregon and threats to public safety will have an impact on the willingness of legislators to consider passage. [HB 2543](#) closes the Charleston Loophole by requiring a background check for every gun purchase, with no exceptions. [HB 2510](#), the Yuille Forsyth Safe Storage Act, is identical to the safe storage bill that languished last session. Gun owners would be required to secure their firearms with a locking device or keep them in a locked container or gun room. Oregon's Attorney General is pushing [SB 396](#), which bans undetectable/untraceable firearms. Senator Ginny Burdick is again sponsoring a bill to regulate guns in public places ([SB 554](#)), which may have more traction this year due to recent events at the State Capitol.

Two more controversial firearm regulation concepts have also been introduced: [SB 604](#) requires licensing for every gun purchase and proof of training every five years. Research suggests this should be

the gold standard for gun safety regulations and is well worth consideration. [SB 585](#) repeals Oregon's firearm preemption law, which means the Legislature would no longer have sole jurisdiction over firearm regulations. This session the League is part of a loose coalition of gun safety supporters called the Oregon Gun Violence Prevention Table. We will be looking closely at the details and suggested amendments for each bill before supporting or opposing. Stay tuned for updates as the session progresses.

Housing (Debbie Aiona and Nancy Donovan)

The number of Oregonians facing homelessness and housing instability has increased dramatically due to the impacts of COVID-19 and wildfires. During the 2021 session we can expect to see many requests for additional funding and policy changes to address this crisis.

Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) and Governor Brown's office presented their proposed legislative agendas to the House Committee on Housing and the Senate Committee on Housing and Development.

The [OHCS's Legislative Agenda](#) groups its proposed investments into three areas: Affordable Rental Housing, Housing Stabilization, and Homeownership.

- Proposed investments in rental housing: bond funding for low-income and permanent supportive housing development, funds for permanent supportive housing services, preservation of existing low-income housing, and an increase in tax credits available for agricultural worker housing.
- Housing stabilization investments: changes to the Individual Development Account program that would tap into general fund dollars, long-term rental assistance for youth, and COVID-19 related energy assistance.

- Homeownership proposals: Down payment assistance, addressing racial disparities in homeownership, and manufactured park preservation and homeownership assistance.

In the third special session, the Senate passed [SB 5731](#), committing a total of \$200 million to OHCS for rental assistance. This will help keep more tenants in their homes during this ongoing crisis.

Governor Brown's [Racial Justice Council and Homelessness Committee](#) recommends bills to:

- Allow applicants seeking rental housing to request an individualized assessment of their application and require the landlord to consider supplemental information. Landlords would be prohibited from rejecting tenants under certain circumstances. [SB 291](#)
- Dedicate funding for long term rent assistance for youth exiting the foster care system. [HB 2163](#)
- Modernize the homelessness system so the state could contract directly with organizations in addition to the Community Action Agency Network, with an emphasis on culturally specific organizations. [HB 2100](#)

Health Care (Bill Walsh)

The Health Care Committees of the Senate and House have set their first meeting for 1/25/21. The Senate is looking at 55 bills (and counting). The House is looking at 110 bills (and counting). I will report on bills as they appear before the health care committees.

The Universal Health Care Task Force, established by [SB 770 \(2019\)](#), is regularly meeting, as are its Technical Advisory Groups (TAG) and Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC). A Long-term Care Committee will be established. The Task Force has assigned over two dozen issues to the various TAGs and special committees to analyze

potential problem areas and devise solutions. They are doing great work on complex issues. They need more time, so Senator James Manning has introduced [SB 428](#) to extend their deadline to 2022. Additional funding to support the work will also be requested.

[SJR 12](#), the HOPE Amendment, another important bill originally sponsored by Rep. Mitch Greenlick (RIP), is now sponsored by Senator Steiner-Hayward and Rep. Rob Nosse. If passed, the amendment would be referred to voters in a future general election. The proposed amendment reads:

SECTION 47. (1) It is the obligation of the state to ensure every resident of Oregon has access to cost-effective, clinically appropriate and affordable health care as a fundamental right.

(2) The obligation of the state described in subsection (1) of this section must be balanced against the public interest in funding public schools and other essential public services, and any remedy arising from an action brought against the state to enforce the provisions of this section may not interfere with the balance described in this subsection.

Anyone wishing to be involved in health care issues may contact me. I am unable to follow the House COVID-19 Health Care Committee or zero in on a particular health care issue, like abortion or dental issues, so help to cover more of these issues is needed.

Health and Human Services (Karen Nibler)

Mental Health and Human Services will be covered together in the same Senate Committee in this session. The first reports by the Department of Human Services Director were on the establishment of a One Eligibility web portal for client applications for both human service and health programs.

As expected the pandemic and wildfires have increased demands for services from individuals and families for food, shelter, and safety

precautions in health care and social service placements. The budget has been supplemented already.

The Behavioral Health Director reported increased stresses due to wildfire displacements and pandemic restrictions. The Coordinated Care Organizations have responsibility for services to the Medicaid population for physical and mental health. The SoS did a recent audit of Oregon Health Plan payments to counties with 22 recommendations for action.

[SB 1 \(2019\)](#) stipulated a System of Care Tracking which has not been established. The Coordinated Care Model 2.0 negotiated last year, will now be responsible for behavioral health services as well as physical health. The agency will need to set performance measures and to identify gaps and goals. The volume of Medicaid data is difficult to manage so the agency will request a data analyst position in the 2021 budget.

The agency set up a call center for children in acute mental health cases. The intent is to access the behavioral health system. Hospital emergency rooms evaluate and hold patients who need hospital or residential treatment services. The crisis service offers stabilization and transition to community support. It involves referrals to the child welfare and juvenile justice systems as well.

Public Safety Report (Karen Nibler)

Both the Senate and House Judiciary Committees met for the first time this week. The Senate Judiciary heard a presentation from the Oregon Judicial Department on family courts and protective orders. The court has increased web hearings due to pandemic restrictions and has increased its backlog of cases that must be heard within timelines. The Department of Justice also laid out its array of services to the state agencies, local law enforcement, crime victims, child support, and civil enforcement of laws.

LC 3150 will bring discussions on the integration of tribal police practices with the Oregon State Police. BM 110 will also bring changes to police and court practices.

House Judiciary had similar presentations from the Oregon Judicial Department and the Attorney General from the Department of Justice. A detailed presentation on the Civil Enforcement Division started with explanations of the Criminal and General Division services to state agencies. Due to the Covid impact, the agency anticipates housing issues in the court systems.

The Police Accountability Committee will meet separately and will continue with recommended changes to police practices. This committee has been proactive in the 2020 short session and gathered testimony from the public and activists.