



JCRC's 2019 Oregon Legislature End-of-Session Report

Last month, the Oregon Legislature adjourned, finalizing a long and difficult session, much more contentious than in years past. With a super majority in both the Senate and the House, Democrats passed a number of priority bills, including: a new business tax to raise a billion dollars for public schools (the Student Success Act), a paid family and medical leave program, an increase in Oregon's earned income tax credit, new affordable housing and tenant protection laws, campaign finance regulations and a referral to the voters for an increase in the tobacco tax. Many of these proposals passed in the final weeks of the session once Senate Republicans agreed to return after leaving the Capitol (and the state) to prevent the Senate from obtaining a quorum. They did so in return for the Democrats agreeing to drop the climate change (or cap-and-trade) bill, HB 2020.

The Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) of the Jewish Federation of Lane County saw a mix of success and disappointment. While excited to see the passage of funding for senior programs through a new provider assessment fee, as well as a mandate to provide Holocaust and genocide education in the state's public schools, the JCRC regretted that wage theft legislation and gun violence prevention bills did not move forward.

Supporting Holocaust and Genocide Education in High Schools

The results of a sobering survey conducted by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany were released last year: Twenty-two percent of millennials haven't heard of the Holocaust or aren't sure whether they've heard of it. Thirty-one percent of American adults (41 percent of millennials) don't know how many Jews were killed in the Holocaust. Forty-one percent of Americans (66 percent of millennials) can't identify what the death camp Auschwitz was. In partnership with the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education, the JCRC was committed to reversing this trend by supporting legislation to mandate Holocaust and genocide education in the state's public high schools.

Senate Bill 664

(<https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2019R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/SB664/A-Engrossed>)

unanimously passed both the Senate and House Education Committees, as well as their respective floors. The bill requires school districts to provide instruction in the Holocaust and genocide beginning with the 2020-2021 school year. It also mandates that the State Board of Education develop academic content standards for Holocaust and genocide studies. Despite the bill's overwhelming support—including from the Catholic Archdiocese of Portland and Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon—it wasn't without controversy. During

testimony on the bill, a small group of Holocaust deniers forced the House Education Committee to momentarily recess and reconvene a short time later. The bill eventually made it to Governor Brown's desk to be signed. On July 15, the Governor held a special bill signing ceremony at the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education.

Strengthening Hate Crimes Legislation

According to the Anti-Defamation League, over the last several years, the American Jewish community has been victimized by hate crimes more than any other religious community. The JCRC supported legislation to revise and strengthen the state's intimidation laws, which had been previously used in the prosecution of bias crimes and met with the Attorney General's Task Force on Hate Crimes.

At the conclusion of the AG's Task Force on Hate Crimes, which met over several months, the committee unanimously submitted several recommendations to the legislature encompassed in Senate Bill 577

(<https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2019R1/Downloads/ProposedAmendment/15098>). SB 577 stipulates that violence, or the immediate threat of violence, based on a person's membership in a protected class is a felony. It also formalizes definitions surrounding crimes of bias to facilitate accurate data collection by law enforcement agencies, thereby enabling the Criminal Justice Commission to analyze this information and provide an understanding of the prevalence of hate crimes in Oregon. Although the bill was voted out of the Senate Judiciary Committee unanimously early in the process, it wasn't until the last two weeks of session that the bill made it to the House and Senate floors. After passage, it was signed into law by the governor.

Protecting Services for Seniors and People with Disabilities

The JCRC supports adequate Medicaid funding for Oregon's most vulnerable populations, as well as funding for home-and community-based service options. At the beginning of the session, Oregon faced a \$830-million Medicaid shortfall for the 2019-21 budget cycle due to the sunset of Measure 101's healthcare provider assessment and the expected decline in federal support of the Medicaid population.

Early in the session, Governor Kate Brown signed House Bill 2010 into law. The bill includes a hospital assessment, generating \$98 million for the Oregon Health Plan (OHP), as well as a health insurance assessment and managed care tax, generating \$334 million for OHP. To provide the rest of the needed funding, Governor Brown proposed a \$2-per-pack increase in the cigarette tax and the creation of an assessment on employers that do not provide affordable coverage to their workers. In the end, the assessment on employers did not pass, but legislators were successful in referring to the ballot a cigarette tax (HB 2270). HB 2270 raises taxes on cigarettes from \$1.33 per pack to \$3.33 per pack, eliminates the .50 cent cap for cigars and subjects e-cigarettes and other vaping products to the 65% wholesale tax currently imposed on other non-cigarette tobacco products.

Protecting Workers Against Wage Theft

The JCRC believes that every worker has the right to live and labor with dignity, safety and hope. Traditionally, victims can file lawsuits to hold bad actors accountable for wage theft, but now businesses are burying forced arbitration provisions deep in employment contracts, denying access to courts and juries. The JCRC supports legislation that would authorize whistleblowers who identify violations to join the state attorney general as a party to the case, thereby bypassing forced arbitration provisions that deny victims their right to go to court.

The focus of the Oregon Coalition Against Wage Theft during the session was Senate Bill 750

(<https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2019R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/SB750/Introduced>), which addresses these concerns. The bill expands the capacity of the Bureau of Labor and Industry (BOLI) to impose consequences for violating worker rights. It also enables BOLI to adopt innovative enforcement strategies designed to reach workers who are most vulnerable to workplace abuses, such as low-wage workers and immigrants. Despite much support and advocacy for the bill, it died in the Joint Ways and Means Committee at the end of the session.

Preventing Gun Violence

The JCRC is a coalition member of the Oregon Alliance for Gun Safety. We are jointly committed to making Oregon safer by keeping guns out of the hands of criminals and dangerous individuals. The group is made up of businesses, faith communities, service organizations, nonprofits and elected officials.

The JCRC supported Senate Bill 978:

(<https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2019R1/Downloads/ProposedAmendment/15678>). The bill was a compilation of concepts attempting to limit gun violence, including, but not limited to, establishing a minimum age of 18 for the purchase of firearms, requiring safe storage of firearms, establishing strict liability for injury caused by a minor's use of a firearm, and allowing the prohibition of firearms on college campuses.

In a rather unusual twist, despite having the required votes on the Senate floor, the bill was sent back to committee where it died. Shortly before the vote, Senate Republicans staged a walkout preventing the Senate body from having the 20-person quorum necessary to conduct business. They later returned, but not without getting assurances from Governor Brown that both SB 978, as well as a bill removing religious exemptions for child vaccinations, would not be moved forward. Shortly after adjournment, many advocates had already begun discussions about introducing legislation during the 2020 session.