



March 2, 2021

Councilor Greg Evans Testimony in Support of SB 398

Chair Prozanski and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of SB 398. For the record, I am Eugene City Councilor Greg Evans, here representing the City of Eugene.

Today, my testimony will be broken into three sections; first is an overview of the Eugene City Councils stance on human rights and racism; second is an update on recent events in Eugene that directly connect to this bill; and third is how this bill would impact our community.

The Eugene City Council has previously adopted ordinances and passed resolutions that focus on creating a welcoming and safe community for everyone living, working, or visiting Eugene. Our City Council has expressed support for the promotion of human rights, to the protection of immigrants and refugees, and to oppose all forms of hate, xenophobia, racism, white supremacy, Anti- Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, sexism and other forms of bigotry.

What we know is that nooses are a symbol of oppression towards African American communities. They were used in the past to kill and to intimidate African Americans. In recent years, nooses continue to be used by white supremacists as a symbol of intimidation. They have been placed in people's yards, displayed in marches, and even this year exhibited in front of the US Capitol Building. It is impossible for anyone to deny that when people use a noose in public, they are using it to intimidate the African American community and continue our country's history of oppression and racism.

To my second point, residents of Eugene are not immune to the use of a noose as hate speech and intimidation. Over the years, several incidents of nooses being displayed publicly or placed in residences of African Americans have been documented. We had another such act of intimidation just two weeks ago, within Senator Manning's district and adjacent to the Ward which I serve. These actions bring memories of a past we have been working so hard to leave behind us. These hurtful acts remind African American people of generational trauma and cause them to fear for their safety.

Some may say, this is just one person speaking their opinion. No, the facts speak for themselves. Despite representing less than 2% of the Eugene population, African-Americans are the group most targeted in hate crimes and discrimination cases reported to the City of Eugene. In 2019, African Americans were victimized in 35% of the reported cases.

If SB-398 is approved, it will show strong support to all in our community to create a safe and welcoming place to call home, visit, play, or work. It will show our African-American and other people of color that our elected leaders not only care, but will act on their conscious to create strong public policy. It will advance the cause of justice and provide repercussions for those that would choose to intimidate others, rather than seek a path of peace and cooperation. SB 398 will allow the perpetrators of such acts to be prosecuted as a Class A misdemeanor, paralleling the penalty for a second-degree bias crime. By increasing the penalty for these despicable and cowardly acts, we hope SB 398 will act as a deterrent against the use of a noose to intimidate our community.

Thank you for your time, your service to our state, and I ask that you support SB 398 with a do-pass recommendation. Please let me know if you have further questions.