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Man, 58, charged under Oregon's new bias crime law

Today, Multnomah County District Attorney Rod Underhill announced that for the first time since Oregon's new bias crime law took effect, a 58-year-old man was charged for allegedly assaulting a group of individuals leaving CC Slaughters in Old Town/Chinatown over the weekend.

This is the first time the new bias crime law has been charged in Multnomah County, and it is believed to be the first time the crime has been issued statewide.

Robert Oden is charged with one count of bias crime in the first degree, one count of felony assault in the fourth degree, two counts of harassment and two counts of bias crime in the second degree.

Under Oregon's new law, it is now a felony to commit a bias crime when a person intentionally, knowingly or recklessly causes physical injury to another person because of the actor's perception of the victim's race, color, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or national origin. Previously, to be charged as a felony, two or more people would need to commit the offense.

According to court documents, this investigation started on August 10, 2019 at approximately 2 a.m. when the three male victims and a witness, all of whom are Latino, were walking away from CC Slaughters. As the group walked along the sidewalk talking, Oden was sitting in an alcove of a nearby building. None of the males spoke with Oden. Shortly after passing by, Oden got up and started yelling at them.

Oden used homophobic language towards the group and then started punching them, hitting three on the face, according to court documents.

The three victims and the witness were able to get away from Oden. As they continued to separate themselves from him, it is alleged Oden yelled, "go back to your country," according to court documents.

Employees from CC Slaughters called police, according to court documents.

As police took Oden into custody, he continued to use racial and homophobic language and threatened continued assaults, according to court documents.

One of the victims had a swollen and bloodied lip and said that he felt substantial pain when hit by Oden, according to court documents.

A charging document is only an accusation of a crime. Oden is innocent unless and until proven guilty.

The Multnomah County District Attorney's Office was an active participant of the Oregon Attorney General's Hate Crimes Task Force and helped draft the language that was in Senate Bill 577. The new law, which went into effect on July 15, 2019, renamed the crime of "intimidation" to "bias crime," added gender identity to the list of protected categories and removed the requirement that two or more people commit the crime in order to make it a felony.

All potential bias crime cases, whether they are a felony or misdemeanor, are reviewed by the Violent Crimes Unit within the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office. If a misdemeanor bias crimes case is issued, the felony-level attorney will retain the case.

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