



## SPOTLIGHT SHINES ON THE RISE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL SHERIFFS MOVEMENT IN OREGON

Anti-government, anti-immigrant, and extreme rhetoric and positions should be source of concern.

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Today, the Oregon Justice Resource Center releases a new report, **“I Am the Law: The Rise of Oregon’s Constitutional Sheriffs,”** discussing how the constitutional sheriffs’ movement has gained a foothold in Oregon and what its influence has been. Sheriffs are the top local law enforcement officers in their county and they possess significant authority within their jurisdiction. While Oregon voters have the opportunity to hold sheriffs accountable at the ballot box, these positions can be subject to abuses, scandals, and violations of constitutional rights when they are ignored by the electorate or co-opted by extremist candidates.

In particular, the constitutional sheriffs movement presents an alarming version of the sheriff’s role and power within their community. This national movement presents a false doctrine that claims sheriffs hold a higher authority in their county than any state or federal elected leader, judge, or other law enforcement. Consequently, those who identify as constitutional sheriffs believe they have plenary power to defy or disregard laws passed by state or federal governments that they consider unconstitutional.

“Sheriffs who align with the constitutional sheriff movement are sending a message to their constituents and supporters that the values of white supremacy, xenophobia, and patriarchy are welcome in their county,” said Justin Low, Investigative Research Associate for the OJRC. “This type of messaging only exacerbates the ongoing problem of race- and gender-based violence in our state and gives bad actors the illusion that they are protected and justified within their county.”

Core beliefs of adherents to the constitutional sheriffs movement include unfettered Second Amendment rights, prioritizing private property rights over public land management, and promoting xenophobic rhetoric and hardline enforcement of anti-immigration laws. One example of a former Oregon sheriff with a warped interpretation of his authority is former Sheriff Glenn Palmer of Grant County. Palmer deputized upwards of 69 civilians as his personal watchdog patrol, supported armed right-wing militants behind sovereign citizen movements, and used deputies to harass federal forestry workers on public lands, among other incidents. Palmer was

eventually ousted after supporting the Bundy family's takeover of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in 2016.

“We need to be vigilant against any attempts to ignore or work around state laws upholding reproductive rights or marriage equality, or gun violence prevention,” said Bobbin Singh, Executive Director, OJRC. “We are witnessing an alarming erosion of our civil rights by our highest courts, all while far-right extremist organizations have begun to co-opt local elected positions. Without protections at the federal level, many of these civil rights and policy topics have become state issues. Consequently, some local elected officials have become emboldened to further roll back civil rights and liberties at the local level, blatantly skirting state laws and regulations.”

OJRC's analysis details the history and background of Oregon's sheriffs and how the constitutional sheriffs movement has come to be influential with some sheriffs. The report describes sheriffs' opposition to gun safety laws, defiance of COVID safety measures, and support for repealing Oregon's sanctuary laws. **“I Am the Law: the Rise of Oregon's Constitutional Sheriffs”** concludes with recommendations for state residents and voters, policymakers, and law enforcement leaders to protect civil rights and enhance safety.

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