

2 April 2013

Re: HB 3194

Subcommittee on Public Safety:

I would like to express my support for passage of HB 3194. It is a balanced and minimal approach to changes in our criminal justice system which will begin to reduce our prison population and the need for future increases in the corrections budget. It is important that we, as a state, move forward as so many other states have already done, in implementing best practices to address criminal justice issues.

The increase in earned good time also will increase the safety in our state prisons for both inmates and corrections staff as it gives meaningful incentives for participating in programs and following prison rules.

Taking some offenses out of the Measure 11 mandatory sentencing scheme will allow judges to use their discretion to review individual circumstances and risk factors when sentencing offenders. The listed offenses sometimes are ones where a person who is innocent is pressured into admitting guilt due to the overreach of the prosecutor's office by threatening a Measure 11 sentence. It is time to balance our justice system and allow the Court or juries to make determinations in those instances.

The funding for re-entry services is of utmost importance if we are to protect our communities from further crime victimization. The findings in the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission study on Re-entry Resource Centers dated January, 2013, shows that re-entry services are not only effective, they are cost-effective. We have a chance in Oregon to support expansion of re-entry services and serve as a model throughout the United States.

The one issue I would emphasize that I don't believe is currently included in this bill is that the funding for re-entry services through grants needs to be administered from the State directly to the re-entry service providers. In the past, funds for re-entry services have been funneled through Community Corrections funds, distributed by each county's Public Safety Coordinating Council and County Commissioners. However, some counties believe that funding of hard beds at the jail are an appropriate use of Community Corrections funds. As many counties in Oregon are experiencing financial difficulties, more and more of funds that used to be used for re-entry services are being diverted to fund the county jails. If the legislature truly wants to fund re-entry services at a level where it will make an impact and reduce recidivism, those grants need to be allocated directly to the re-entry service providers. Thank you for listening to my comments.

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