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Dear Members of the Joint Committee on Public Safety,

Monday's forecast from the Office of Economic Analysis is yet another timely reminder that the price of inaction on sentencing and corrections policy for Oregon taxpayers is too high -- \$600 million in additional public dollars. The April forecast corroborates the findings of the bipartisan Commission on Public Safety that I chaired: Oregon will need 2,000 new prison beds in the next decade and hundreds in the next biennium alone if policymakers fail to act.

I was heartened to see that this forecast has been accepted by many public safety stakeholder groups, especially those that have previously raised concerns about the usefulness of our state corrections forecast. This is important. We will get nowhere if we bury our heads in the sand to data.

I was, however, troubled to hear that some have interpreted our most recent forecast as good news, indicating that Oregon is somehow headed down a sustainable and even desirable path. The simple fact is that we can hardly afford the prison population we have now, let alone the prison population we will have in ten years, without further compromising local public safety infrastructure.

History has shown us that public safety funding is a zero-sum proposition: dollars spent on prisons are funds that cannot be invested in drug courts, victim services, reentry, and mental health treatment. Last biennium, as the prison budget grew, community corrections funding fell by 20%. Since 2007, victim services funding has fallen by 18%, despite urgent needs. These are unacceptable collateral costs of a prison system that grows while the majority of states reap the benefits of less crime *and* less imprisonment.

What I learned as chair of the Commission on Public Safety was that Oregon's reputation as a national leader in effective corrections policies has been threatened in the last decade as our public safety system has trended toward more expensive, less effective ways to hold offenders accountable. The costs of longer and longer prison stays have come at the expense of crime-fighting resources in cash-strapped counties.

The Commission charted a path for a safer Oregon. With no evidence that more prison beds will bring Oregon more public safety and with overwhelming evidence that investments in local recidivism reduction programs will, we proposed a plan that places Oregon's corrections system back on course. Our efforts are before you in HB3194, a comprehensive sentencing and corrections bill that focuses prison space on serious violent offenders, holds offenders accountable, and improves public safety. This bill will avert all forecasted prison growth and allow for immediate reinvestment -- some \$32 million this biennium alone -- into the counties and front-line public safety agencies that need it.

The April forecast is a call to action. We can and must pursue an evidence-based, cost effective public safety system. Our local public safety systems can afford no less.

Respectfully


Paul J. De Muniz

Distinguished Jurist In Residence