

Testimony before Joint Committee on Public Safety
HB 3194
Gary Griffin
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& Metropolitan Alliance for Common Good
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Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee, for the record my name is Gary Griffin. I am a member of PHOENIX Rising Transitions and a leader with the Metropolitan Alliance for Common Good in Portland. I am here to urge you to support House Bill 3194. This bill will cut prison costs and create savings that can be reinvested in community-based reentry programs – like mentoring. These important programs increase the likelihood that a person will live a crime-free life after prison, but they are woefully underfunded.

A strong reentry program has been very important in my own transition. I have been home for 33 days and I am one of a fortunate few who have mentor support through PHOENIX Rising Transitions.

This is the second time I've been released from prison. The first time was in 2006. I was paroled with nothing and to nothing. Most Oregon counties have few, if any, transitional services programs. Even when I paroled to Lane County, there wasn't much beyond short-term housing. I was lucky enough to find work immediately, but it was seasonal tree work. When the weather got bad, the work dried up. I felt hopeless. Faced with desperate need and no support system, I went right back to my old ways. Before long I was back in jail and on my way to the penitentiary.

This time I worked for over a year with Phoenix Rising Transitions' Community InReach while still in prison. I learned new skills in their Nonviolent Communication class that have helped me in all areas of my life. In their leadership class I was mentored by others who had been in prison. I was deeply encouraged by the changes I saw in them. This provided an opening for change to occur in me. I sought success by surrounding myself with the success of others who had walked my path.

Through PHOENIX and Metropolitan Alliance for Common Good I also formed meaningful relationships with people in the community – something I had never thought possible. Relating to community members AND those who succeeded in breaking their own criminal cycle opened a door for me. This time I came home as a hopeful citizen, rather than a hopeless "ex-con."

Now I have two PHOENIX mentors that I see several times a week. I am attending Portland Community College and volunteering with Metropolitan Alliance for Common Good to make positive change in my community.

Oregon needs more community-based alternatives to incarceration. And it needs to fund vital reentry work like mentoring. House Bill 3194 will allow more public safety dollars to be directed toward these programs that better prepare people for life in the community. And it will go a long way toward creating safer communities – because mentoring is about changing lives.

Thank you.