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200 SW Market St., Suite 150, Portland, Oregon 97201

Ph: 503-552-6773 • Fax: 503-323-9186 • www.pdxccc.org



Testimony of Dave Williams
Citizens Crime Commission
Joint Public Safety Committee
April 3, 2013
Support for HB 3194

Good evening Co-Chairs Garrett and Olsen and committee members, thank you for all your work and for giving me this opportunity to speak to you. My name is Dave Williams, I am the Vice President of Utility Services for Northwest Natural Gas, and Chair of the Citizens Crime Commission. I have been with NW Natural for 35 years and have been involved with the Crime Commission for 7 years. I am here today in support of the Oregon Public Safety Package contained in HB 3194. We join other business associations in supporting public safety reforms as part of the Business Plan to help grow Oregon's economy by making wise investments of our public dollars.

For two decades, the Citizens Crime Commission has brought a business perspective to public safety policy and practices. We have worked closely with government officials, criminal justice professionals and lawmakers to make Oregon's state and local communities safer. During that time, we have seen a lot of successes in crime reduction thanks to policy decisions investing scarce resources in the right places, but we are also aware of troubling trends in our state that threaten to erode the headway we've made toward safer communities.

While I am not a policy expert on corrections, our board has followed the work of the Governor's Public Safety Commission made up of experts, and appreciate their comprehensive examination of the data and trends in corrections. Their report highlights the strength of Oregon's public safety system. We have generally used our prisons for violent crimes and sex offenses. But the report also highlights the unmistakable trend towards using more of our prison beds for persons convicted of nonviolent offenses. That trend has implications for our state's investments in other more cost effective alternatives that are proven to reduce crime. The public safety commission report and HB 3194 provides a well reasoned, balanced roadmap for evidence based reforms that will alter the trend.

Without action at this time, the state faces a projected growth of prison beds over the next decade that will require building a new prison at a total cost of \$600 million. This problem is not going away. If the state maintains current policies and practices that direct scarce resources towards funding prisons, it threatens funding available for the programs and efforts that have a proven track record of reducing recidivism and improving public safety. We support investing those public safety dollars towards police, victim services, community corrections, and evidence based treatment for addiction and mental issues that feed criminal behavior. Those investments are proven to produce the public safety outcomes of reduced recidivism, lower crime, and reduced victimization.

We support fine-tuning Oregon's sentencing and corrections policy to get our state's public safety system back on track. We urge using the savings from the averted prison growth be reinvested into communities to invest in what works to reduce recidivism and increase public safety.

We support a common sense balanced approach contained in HB 3194. We believe such reforms will deliver accountability, justice and a better return on Oregon's public safety dollars.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. Again, I ask your support for HB 3194 and I urge the Committee to move this package forward.