

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

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Testimony on HB 3194
Joint Committee on Public Safety

My name is David Leslie, and I am the executive director of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) is a statewide association of Christian denominations, congregations, ecumenical organizations and interfaith partners representing all parts of the state.

I am here today in support of HB 3194. Foundational to our core values is a belief in the power of restorative justice, which holds that justice is best served when those impacted by crime—the victim, perpetrator and broader community—are given opportunities to constructively engage in the criminal justice system. Toward these ends, EMO supports flexibility in sentencing that takes into account the needs of and support for the victims, the full nature of any crime including the age of and developmental aspects of the perpetrator, alternatives to incarceration that reduce the need for prisons and jails, and investment in programs that reduce the possibility of front-end criminal behavior and recidivism.

With this as background, there are several aspects of HB 3194 that I want to lift up in support, this afternoon. First, we believe that there needs to be equity in the sentencing process that balances the role of judges and the sentencing power of district attorneys. Eliminating mandatory minimum sentences for certain types of offenses will lead to less reliance on the need for long-term jail and prison sentences, reducing stress on our state prison system. Likewise, we wholeheartedly support recommendations that allow for reduction in current sentences and participation in alternative incarceration programs, if certain conditions are met, allowing for accelerated reintegration into and contributing to the betterment of society.

Second, we are also supportive of the distinction this legislation makes between adolescents and adults at the sentencing phase. We support the elimination of the possibility of 15, 16 or 17-year-olds being charged as adults for certain crimes, and earned review for youth offenders who have already served a majority of their sentence. We believe that these two changes recognize that it is wrong to charge youth as adults and that the cognitive and emotional developmental stages of youth are not the same as adults. We also believe that the stories of many young people in the criminal justice system can change from a narrative of crime, and seemingly unending punishment, to a narrative of redemption. As such, this bill offers the possibility for some young people in the system to return to their communities more quickly and rebuild their lives in ways that will give them a productive stake in their future and society's future.

The third and last aspect of the bill I want to lift up this afternoon is related to the cost containments included in the legislation. Today, it is important that we take steps to contain tomorrow's projected spending for new prison beds in existing or new jails and prisons. We support the community corrections incentive grant concept and cost containment solutions that reduce the operating costs of the Oregon Department of Corrections over the next decade. Hopefully, recognized cost savings can be reinvested in ways that reduce crime in the first place and the propensity for repeat offenses.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 3194. I know the decisions before you are complex and politically challenging. However, reform is necessary for both human rights and economic reasons. This is important legislation that sets forth an important blueprint for the future of the criminal justice system in Oregon. Restorative justice challenges us to expand our vision beyond a retributive model

of justice that focuses almost exclusively on the inflexible sentencing of the offender, to a more balanced approach that pays attention to the needs of all of those affected by the crime. HB 3194 helps to implement this much needed balance, and thereby contributes to a more just and sustainable system and safer communities. For these reasons, I urge your support of HB 3194.

Respectfully,

David Leslie