



Taking action for basic human needs.



Testimony in Support of HB 3194

Joint Committee on Public Safety, April 5, 2013

Andy Smith, Co-Chair, Human Services Coalition of Oregon (HSCO)

Good afternoon Co-Chair Winters, Prozanski, Olson and Garrett and members of the Committee. My name is Andy Smith and I am testifying today as a Co-Chair of the Human Services Coalition of Oregon.

“HSCO” as we call ourselves, is a big tent, umbrella coalition of comprised of more than 80 human services organizations. Our membership advocates for a wide range of Oregonians including services for seniors, for a better health care system, for stable housing, for mental health and addictions treatment, for crime victims services, for an improved child welfare system, and for an improved public safety system .

On Wednesday you heard from other HSCO representatives in support of this bill. So why I am here again today?

Simply put this is a very important bill, whose time has come. Although it’s hard to believe, this is an occasion when Oregon can actually can learn something from the otherwise dysfunctional politics of Washington D.C.

Just a few weeks ago, two people who have never been able to agree on anything, came to agreement on the basic issue before you today. Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) and Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) have jointly introduced a bill that gives judges more discretion on mandatory minimum sentences. **The Justice Safety Valve Act of 2013 is intended “to prevent unjust and irrational criminal punishments,” according to the text of the measure.**

Sen. Leahy commented: “As a former prosecutor, I understand that criminals must be held accountable. Our reliance on mandatory minimums has been a great mistake. I am not convinced it has reduced crime. ... It is time for us to let judges go back to acting as judges and making decisions based on the individual facts before them.”

Senator Paul remarked that mandatory minimum laws “reflect a Washington-knows-best, one-size-fits-all approach, which undermines the constitutional separation of powers, violates the bedrock principle that people should be treated as individuals, and costs the taxpayers money without making them any safer.”

Across the country this bipartisan consensus on needed reforms in public safety approaches is remarkable.

“Texas did well with justice reinvestment”

Charleston, West Virginia Daily Mail, Editorial

Wednesday March 27, 2013

(Author Jerry Madden is former Republican chairman of the Corrections Committee of the Texas House of Representatives and a signatory of the Right on Crime campaign)

Do West Virginia taxpayers want to keep spending more and more on state prisons while lagging behind the rest of the country in crime reduction? That’s an important question for Mountain State.policymakers. For three years, West Virginia has led all states in its average annual prison population growth. Yet while crime fell 19 percent nationally from 2003 to 2011, it has not dropped in West Virginia. And unless West Virginia changes course, its prison population will increase by another 24 percent over the next six years, at a cost of an additional \$150 million.

As a conservative Republican leader from Texas, I can tell you that when we faced similar challenges six years ago, we made choices and cut crime and costs dramatically.

In Texas, we too had been rapidly expanding our prisons without seeing an improvement in our crime rate compared to other states. After looking at years of research, we found that focusing prison space on violent and career criminals and directing funds to proven alternatives for lower-level offenders would yield greater results for public safety. So that's what we did: We stopped our astronomically expensive prison-building spree and instead steered a much smaller investment into additional parole and probation officers, and evidence-based programs like specialty courts and short-term residential treatment facilities. The results have been remarkable. The rate at which parolees are revoked back to prison has been cut in half. The overall state crime rate has fallen to levels we haven't seen since the 1960s.

Meanwhile, taxpayers have avoided nearly all of the \$2 billion in projected corrections costs, and we even were able to close a state prison - the first time that's happened in Texas history. Now, West Virginia is considering a similar policy shift. The state's bipartisan Justice Reinvestment Working Group has drafted a sound policy framework that is estimated to save taxpayers millions while reinvesting a small portion of the savings into substance abuse treatment for people on community supervision. That makes a great deal of sense. As much as 80 percent of parole revocations involve substance abuse, yet West Virginia currently funds no treatment for offenders under supervision. In West Virginia, as in Texas, conservative principles demand that spending actually deliver results in the most proven, cost-effective way.

So what can Oregon learn from Texas?

A Yes Vote on HB 3194 is a Vote for a Safer Oregon--A Vote for Fewer Victims---A Vote for Fewer Broken Lives—and Sound Budget Policy; It's A Vote for the Principle that Data and Evidence Matters over politics.

Also, it's not just bipartisanship in Washington DC or Texas that's taking hold---it's across the nation.

In Ohio, Governor John Kasich made criminal justice reform a priority of his administration and in 2011 signed a reform bill designed to send low-level nonviolent felons to rehabilitation facilities in lieu of prison, put a credit-earned system in place, and adjust prison sentences for drug and petty theft offenses. The package was proposed as a means to save money, reduce recidivism, and ease overcrowding. Upon signing the bill, Kasich said: "I get emotional about this because I think the passage of this bill ... is going to result in the saving of many, many lives, maybe even thousands, before all is said and done. I think as we all know, the type of reform in this legislation has sat idle for 25 years ... Nobody wanted to touch it."

In Oklahoma, Governor Fallin said, "[I]n addition to saving tax dollars, [community sentencing options] will help nonviolent offenders, many of whom have substance abuse problems, to receive treatment and safely get back into their communities."

In Virginia, former Virginia U.S. Senator and Secretary of the Navy Jim Webb summarized that the "...Focus must be placed on locking up the most dangerous people instead of diverting time and money to incarcerate the wrong people."

In Florida, Jeb Bush noted "States across the country, including Florida, are proving that policies based on these sound conservative principles will reduce crime and its cost to taxpayers."

At a recent lecture on **Stanford's conservative Hoover Institution**, Grover Norquist shared that "It's not just about (saving) money...it's all about liberty. Let's have the smallest possible footprint in people's lives while keeping people as safe as possible." Grover Norquist

This is our chance Oregon to do something wise, something big for our public safety system and something good for all Oregonians.

As former Yankee Yogi Berra once said, "when you come to a fork in the road, take it". Let's laugh at this Yogism, but let's also get this important public policy choice right. Please support HB 3194.