

The Right Reverend Michael Hanley
Bishop

Diocese of Oregon



**Commission on Jail and Prison Ministry
The Rev. Thomas R. English, Chair**

April 3, 2013

Before the Joint Committee on Public Safety in Support of H.B. 3194

Good afternoon, for the record, I am the Rev. Thomas R. English and I reside at 2530 Fairmount Blvd. in Eugene.

I am appearing here on behalf of the Episcopal Diocese of Oregon Commission on Jail and Prison Ministry as well as our partners, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon and the Partnership for Safety and Justice.

Honorable Co-Chairs and members of the committee, I am here in support of H.B. 3194 (The Public Safety Package). I am a semi-retired criminal justice professional having spent over 35 years as a consultant for the U.S. Department of Justice assisting jurisdictions throughout the country to adopt and implement practices supported by what has become a sturdy and robust body of research on what works in crime prevention and corrections¹. I received a Masters degree in Corrections from the University of Oregon in 1972. For the last fourteen years I have served as a volunteer chaplain at the Lane County Jail and for a shorter period as a regional chaplain for the Oregon Department of Corrections where I also serve on the Department's Religious Services Advisory Council. For the past several years I have served as a board member of Sponsors Inc., a community-based re-entry program in Eugene and now serve as Board Chair. However, my comments today reflect only the position of the Episcopal Diocese of Oregon's Commission on Jail and Prison Ministries.

Clerics and churches are often viewed as idealistic, unrealistic or even soft on crime. However, I want you to know that the Christian Church has historically always taken public safety, crime and punishment very seriously and continues to do so today. Without order, the Church cannot function and it is in the Church's concern for order that we have become complicit in the distortions of justice that cause so much harm today.

We are called to confess that the Church itself and its members fall short in responding to crime, its harms and the justice system. Often we have been complacent or allowed fear or hatred of the stranger to dictate responses to crime. We have allowed the cries of the harmed to go unheard. We have allowed the burdens of crime and the criminal justice system to be unfairly borne. In confessing its complicity with a system gone awry, this church invokes the judgment and guidance of God. We turn to God for

counsel on how we might minister better and more mercifully to those harmed by injustice and how we might advocate for changes which better balance victim services, offender accountability and public safety at the community level.²

We honor, support and thank those individuals working in our criminal justice system and those who render judgments. Our hope in the coming of God's justice makes us especially mindful of victims and the isolation and dehumanization of individuals convicted of crimes, as well as the shortcomings of a system in crisis.

The criminal justice in Oregon as well as the nation is seriously out of balance. Our over-reliance on incarceration in Oregon promises to bankrupt those very community-based services and supports such as public schools, community colleges, mental health and drug and alcohol treatment services that research tells us prevent crime and promote public safety.

The Episcopal Diocese of Oregon's Commission on Jail and Prison Ministries supports the reforms in HB 3194 that would implement modest reforms to Measure 11 and Measure 57 to help the state save money and re-invest those savings into the parts of our public safety system such as community corrections and victim services, re-entry programs, and local law enforcement – that have been decimated over the last decade.

It is time to get smart about crime and utilize what our own research tells us. Accountability is critical and so is crime prevention. What really matters for community safety is not how long an offender is in prison, but that the system does a better job of making sure that when that person does get out, he or she is less likely to commit another crime. Further, these reforms promise to both save money and increase public safety while increasing opportunities for rehabilitation.

Finally, it is important to note that in addition to the Episcopal Church of the United States, other Christian denominations have and continue to advocate for responsible and humane public safety reform including the Presbyterian Church USA, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and many others.

¹ See *Implementing Evidence-Based Principles in Community Corrections: Collaboration for Systemic Change in the Criminal Justice System*. U.S. Department of Justice. National Institute of Corrections.

² See A Resource Guide for Criminal Justice Sunday, Diocese of Oregon Commission on Jail and Prison Ministries, 2012