

To: Special Committee on Public Safety

From: Tony Funchess, PCC student

Subject: House Bill 3194 Testimony

Date: April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Hello Co-chairs and members of the committee. For the record my name is Tony Funchess. Currently there are over 10,000 adults under the jurisdiction of the Multnomah County Department of Community Justice Adult Services Division and I am one of them.

I was released from prison August 28, 2010 and immediately placed on Post-Prison Supervision by the Oregon Board of Parole and Post-Prison Supervision. In 1989 the Board of Parole and Post-Prison Supervision supervised 2000 Oregonians but by 2009 that number had grown to over 14,000. 95% of all prison inmates will one day be released. One day they will be returning home to our communities. I am here today to support House Bill 3194 because this bill is about Oregon's future. This bill doesn't change anything for people currently in the system, HB 3194 doesn't let anyone out; instead this bill is about lowering recidivism rates and improving the community programs like the ones I was fortunate enough to access.

This bill seeks to increase the emphasis and funding for community justice. Community Justice represents one key component in the re-entry process, and a crucial element in the reduction of recidivism rates. As Oregonians are released from prison they return to their community where they must learn to re-integrate themselves, adhere to supervision conditions, and become successful contributing adults.

When I was faced with this task it seemed impossible. I had a bunch of conditions placed upon me that restricted where I went, what I did, who I associated with, on and on. My parole officer wanted me to get a job, pay my supervision fees, find housing, attend treatment, and meet with her all at the same time and successfully accomplish the major tasks of finding employment and housing within a short window of time. It was overwhelming and in the current economy an unrealistic expectation.

Recently, my mother who has become a mentor to incarcerated women and a certified Department of Corrections volunteer had a mentee who was released on transitional leave. This young woman had no family support, no work history, and limited education. She was released to a transitional home and expected to within a short period of time find a job and begin paying for her housing. The Oregon Employment Department in 2011 listed the unemployment rate at 9.4%, but for blacks 21.3%. The economy worked against her, her background worked against her, being a felon worked against her and the very system set up to help her succeed worked against her.

When we view community justice as a whole we must remember the community part. We must fail not to utilize that aspect of the corrections process. There are community programs, and community leaders who want to join in this process of helping to make our communities safer, and whole. Individuals who are removed from the community through the corrections process do one day return. It is the

community that must partner with corrections entities to help ensure a safe, positive, productive transition and re-entry.

When dollars are given to programs that help prevent incarceration like access to higher education, drug/alcohol treatment, community courts there is an exponential return on those dollars greater than the ones seen by simply incarcerating people. For example, for every \$1 spent on Youth Diversion programs that prevent early incarceration there is over a \$24 return on that investment alone.

There is a restorative power that community support gives to an individual who has been through the criminal justice system. When I came home I had no hope. I was a felon. I was on Parole. Basically, I was unemployable, unable to obtain housing, and felt utterly unloved. However, through the support of family, friends, faith-based organizations, Portland Community College, the organization Better People and the community at large I have found hope and success.

Since returning home I have returned to school. I did this in complete opposition to my Parole officer's insistence that I get a job. I believed that education, higher education was one of the most crucial elements of my re-entry, transition and success. I needed to be working towards something I believed in and be in an environment that rewarded me for my success, held me accountable for my failures and did so without the fear of sanctions and incarcerations. Through the insistence of my support system I enrolled myself into the Better People program. A local church paid my fees, but I was committed to demonstrate my willingness to at least to find a job. In return for their contribution provided volunteer hours to senior citizen members of their congregation. I successfully graduated the Better People program and was asked to speak at the graduation ceremony. I moved home. I needed to be in safe place where people who knew me and loved me could help me get back on my feet, help me be accountable, and support me through the transition and re-entry process.

My success has been my community's success. Since returning home and enrolling in Portland Community College I have consistently been on the honor roll making the President's list for having a 4.0 GPA for the last 3 consecutive terms for a total of 5 out of 9 terms. I am President of the Black Student Union, Peer-Mentor for our Federally-funded TRiO program, and Student Coordinator of a new culturally specific access, engagement, retention and transition program called the Passage. None of this would have been possible without community programs being in place to help support my transition and re-entry. Without the involvement of my community I would have probably followed the route of so many other released individuals' re-incarceration.

On May 21, 2013 I will no longer be on Post-Prison Supervision. Where I stand today, in giving this testimony, speaks of the value of the justice reinvestment. The dollars given to community programs, faith-based organizations, community colleges, constructing hope and many other alternative programs will give you a greater return than what we currently see. My success is proof of that. So when you hear, read or see the name Tony Funchess from Portland, Oregon it won't be that I'm a Felon that you think of, but you will recognize me as a leader and success story. It is my plea that you will pass House Bill 3194.