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TO: JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

FR: JUDITH ARMATTA

DA: APRIL 5, 2013

RE: SUPPORT FOR HB 3193 AND 3194

Honorable Chairman Prozanski, Chairwoman Winters, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of HB 3193 and HB 3194 to improve Oregon's public safety system. My name is Judith Armatta. I am an attorney, long time human rights activist, former counsel for the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence, and staff attorney for the now-defunct Prisoners Legal Services of Oregon. For the past fifteen years I have been working at the international level, including monitoring, providing commentary, and writing a book on the war crimes trial of Slobodan Milosevic. I am happy to return home to Oregon and equally pleased to find serious efforts on public safety reform. Thank you for your work and for bringing this important legislation to a hearing.

These bills are a step in bringing sanity to our public safety system. They will begin to redirect state resources to areas that are the most cost effective and, importantly, increase public safety. A large and ever-growing prison population robs services for victims and services that could prevent crime, such as mental health, substance abuse, education, and job training. While Oregon may have one of the better criminal justice systems in the United States, the U.S. is notorious for locking up the most people in the world (25% of all prisoners with only 5% of world population). That means Oregon is the best of the worst, not exactly something to be proud of.

Since the 1980's when I began practicing law and Oregon had only three prisons, we have experienced a 350% increase in the prison population and now have fourteen prisons. As the Committee considers statistics and studies, I urge you to remember that these represent human beings and citizens of this state. About 93% of those imprisoned will return to our communities. They face lifelong struggles to find work and make a meaningful life. That affects

an ever-widening circle of families as well as the general public. I know. My family is one of them. A harsh criminal justice system responded to the mental health, addiction, educational, and employment needs of my young nephew by ultimately imprisoning him for over a year (90% idle time) for minor probation violations. That is a tragic misuse of public funds, creating impediments to his participation in our community as a contributing member. It is a burden on our family and all Oregonians. Most of all, it breaks my heart because I know what he could have been if he had received services instead of being imprisoned and labeled a felon for life.

I urge you to support HB 3193 and HB 3194 to bring some sanity into this system and increase our community's safety and prosperity.

Respectfully,

Judith Armatta
Attorney at Law