

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 3183-4
Submitted to the Senate Judiciary Committee
By Shannon Wight, Associate Director, Partnership for Safety and Justice
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Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Close, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Shannon Wight and I am the Associate Director at Partnership for Safety and Justice. Partnership of Safety and Justice is a non-profit, statewide membership organization that has worked in Oregon for 14 years. We are a unique organization in that we advocate for policies that benefit both people convicted of crime and victims of crime. We believe we can and should have a public safety system that ensures the people most impacted by crime and violence have opportunities to rebuild their lives.

I submit this testimony on behalf of Partnership for Safety and Justice in support of HB 3183, which would make it permissible for youth convicted as adults to be sent directly to an Oregon Youth Authority facility rather than being processed through the adult prison at Coffee Creek, which is the current practice.

Just over a year ago, we heard from some of our members that youth who are convicted as adults were spending a week or more at Coffee Creek to complete an intake and evaluation process. In Oregon, youth convicted as adults can serve until their 25th birthday in Oregon Youth Authority facilities, though they are in the legal custody of the Department of Corrections. That is good practice and helps ensure that youth are both held accountable and have the skills they need to succeed after serving their sentence.

As is often the case when youth are in adult prison and jails, these youth were frequently held in isolation cells for 23 hours a day for their own protection during their week of processing and evaluation. Particularly for youth with pre-existing mental health conditions, this was a terrifying experience and one that is known to aggravate mental health problems.

When we learned of this practice, PSJ contacted both the Department of Corrections and the Oregon Youth Authority to find out why the practice existed. No one currently in office – then Max Williams at DOC and Colette Peters and the Oregon Youth Authority – were sure why and agreed that it would be more efficient and consistent with best practices to have youth go directly to OYA.

As it turns out there are both logistical and legal challenges to changing the practice of having youth do intake for a state sentence at Hillcrest for boys or Oak Creek for girls. The challenges involve both the statutory changes that are addressed in HB 3183 and

numerous bureaucratic and transportation related complications that have not yet been resolved. HB 3183 is narrowly tailored to address the statutory barrier to this more efficient and effective process. Current statute requires that youth convicted as adults be committed to the physical and legal custody of the Department of Corrections. HB 3183 simply states that the youth will continue to be in the legal custody of the Department of Corrections but can be transported to physical custody of either the DOC or OYA. This bill makes it allowable to transport youth directly to OYA; it does not mandate it.

We will continue to be in conversation with the DOC to see if we can find a solution that allows youth to go directly to an Oregon Youth Authority facility upon commitment. HB 3183 makes it legal to do so should we be able to come to an agreed upon means to do so.

In recognition of the fact that youth are best served when they do not come into contact with the adult prison system, the Department of Corrections has shortened the amount of time a youth is in their custody for intake. I have been told youth are usually processed now within two hours. Our concern is that this is first, inefficient, and second, continues to have youth exposed to adult prisoners and prisons.

We ask for your support of HB 3183.