

TESTIMONY

House Committee on Judiciary, 2013 Oregon Legislature

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Presented by:

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My name is Trina Strand, and I am a Residential Program Director for Janus Youth Programs in Portland. Janus is one of the largest nonprofit agencies in the state serving high needs youth. We have 44 programs at 20 different locations and work with over 600 teenagers and young adults daily. Our programs include the largest teen parent program in the state, runaway and homeless youth services in Portland and Southwest Washington, and the only emergency and long-term shelter program for minor victims of sex trafficking in the state.

In 1977, Janus began working with the state to provide services for youth in the juvenile justice system. We pioneered the first program to accelerate transitions from the state training schools, two of the first programs in the state to work with juvenile sexual offenders (one a prevention program to keep youth out of closed custody and one a transition program for 17-24 year old youth leaving closed custody institutions), and the first supervised apartment transition model for youth offenders.

Janus currently operates three programs for OYA and one program for DHS serving 42 youth ages 13-24 daily designed to work specifically with young men and families who have experienced sexual trauma. The two residential programs that I personally supervise provide long-term care for youth under age 18 in either OYA or DHS custody. These are very intensive, long-term treatment programs that help these boys and their families heal from abuse. Youth will be with us for at least 2 years and will participate in full day of school and at least 14 hours of treatment each week they are with us. Services provided include individual, group and family therapy and skill building. To graduate from our programs a youth must successfully complete a seven level evidenced informed treatment curriculum. This is a major accomplishment and cannot be faked. The majority of our youth particularly those under 16 perpetuated and experienced trauma in their family system. For this reason our programs place great emphasis on insuring all family members benefit from treatment services. Our monthly family education groups run at capacity and we are providing service to as many as four generations in some families.

After working with these youth for over two decades, I can assure you of one thing: they do change and they do become positive members of our society. Most of our boys, for instance, now return to the families where their abuse occurred. Our Cordero program has a recidivism rate of **ZERO** for sexual offenses over the past 5 years. Equally important, they complete school, get jobs, and eventually start families of their own. When they complete our program, they are ready to return to their families and to have a positive impact on their community. Our mission with these youth is not just that they never sexually harm another person but that they become a part of the solution to end sexual abuse in their community.

Our experience at Janus during the last 20 years has shown us that children who act out sexually do so for much different reasons than adults and they do so in response to significant childhood traumas that they experience and then normalize and that with therapeutic services and pro-social relationships distorted thoughts can be changed.

Yet the youth who do so well in our program and in the years following are held back by Oregon's current registration laws. They will face lifetime barriers to continuing this success: they can be barred from attending school and they face discrimination in obtaining employment and housing. After we restore their self confidence and set them up to succeed, registration requirements miss label them and set them up to fail.

We have had cases of young men being unable to attend their own church when this church could have been a crucial part of the long-term support necessary to maintain success.

We have youth who desperately want to serve their country in the armed forces and are turned away.

We have youth who work hard to get admitted to college and are denied financial aid because of registration.

We have families who have to choose between keeping their low income housing or reuniting their family.

We have had past clients who have become good loving Dad's threatened with the removal of their children in their 20's because of one action they committed when they were 12 or 13.

We made significant changes in the registration laws last session thanks to the leadership on this committee. Janus Youth Programs fully supports the changes being proposed in HB 2552 as the next logical and necessary step.

These changes will NOT threaten public safety. Let me repeat, these changes will NOT threaten public safety. Rather they will provide the investment and support in these young men to assure they continue to function as safe, contributing members of our families and communities.

At a Janus Board Retreat last year, four boys from Cordero shared their personal stories with our Board members. When they were asked by one of the Board, "What is one thing that you want us as adults to understand about you and your life?" all four had the same exact answer: "Don't see us as Monsters."

I do not see these boy's as monsters and I hope that you do not either. Please help us to show them we respect their change by not supporting legislation that seeks to label them and their families for the rest of their lives.

On behalf of Janus Youth Programs, we urge you to support HB 2552. Your "Yes" vote will make a profound statement: that we recognize that boys who have made mistakes do change. They show us that they will succeed if we let them.