

Testimony on SB 5542 the Budget for Oregon Youth Authority

Dear Chair Shields, Chair Williamson and the Members of the Ways and Means Sub-committee on Public Safety,

Oregon AFSCME represents many over a hundred of the workers at the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) mostly in the Parole and Probation department. We are happy to support the OYA budget and the good and innovative work the Department is doing and that is represented in the budget request. The department has taken on a hard look at their systems and how they serve endangered youth and how to stop cycles of negative outcomes and find a way to get better outcomes for all the youth in their care. An important part of this process is making sure there is funding for Phase one of a 10 year plan to reinvest the work of OYA. As we make better use of the resources at OYA and get better outcomes every year, we need to make sure that the department is not underfunded. The agency has been successful in decreasing the number of close custody youth and limiting the number of beds at many of the facilities. They are saving money, we need to make sure that the response to this success is to not slash their budget but to reinvest and continue the good work and make it even better.

The 10 year plan would help the department not only decrease the number of close custody beds but do it in a way that is smart and makes sure we do not rush to cut. The buildings we have now are not right for the population we have now and the services we want to deliver now and in the future. Some facilities should be closed and all need to be refurbished not just because they are old and need maintenance but because they are not set up for how the services to these youth can be best administered. This work will deliver better services and it will be safer for the staff. It will create more recreational areas for the youth and make it a better living environment for them and that translates into better outcomes.

Eventually this investment will allow the Department to stabilize the number of close custody youth and will hopefully be far less need for close custody. The 10 year plan creates a frame work for a process to be deliberate and smart. There will be a glide path for the reform of the system to one that is better for Oregon. This plan will keep current staff and be the least disruptive way to achieve the goals that we want. It is too important to not fund in the opinion of AFSCME. The Governor allocated 33 million for phase one and we strongly support that allocation. Please support the funding of phase one of the 10 year plan.

Submitted by Joe Baessler, Political Director for Oregon AFSCME