

Youth, Rights & Justice

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

To: Public Safety Subcommittee of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means,
2015 Oregon Legislature

From: Mark McKechnie, Executive Director, Youth, Rights & Justice

Date: February 25, 2015

Re: **Support for SB 5542**

Co-Chairs Williamson and Shields and Members of the Subcommittee:

Youth, Rights & Justice (YRJ) was founded 40 years ago and has been dedicated to providing legal representation and advocacy to over 50,000 children, youth and parents involved in the juvenile court system, including children in foster care and youth in the juvenile justice system. YRJ represents youth in juvenile delinquency matters at the trial level in Multnomah County and at the appellate level statewide. YRJ also represents youth who are committed to the custody of the Juvenile Psychiatric Security Review Board due to a serious mental illness or developmental disability.

Juvenile court systems were established more than 100 years ago based upon the recognition that children are different from adults. In the last 20 years, medical research has helped to uncover and describe the physical differences in the brain which show, conclusively, that children and youth are not merely small adults. It is important that our state's responses to youth who engage in unlawful behaviors are grounded in this understanding.

YRJ wants to express our support for the Youth Authority and its 2015-17 budget requests. The work of OYA is very important. While accountability, reformation and public safety are critical goals of the agency, OYA's current programming also recognizes that the youth who enter the deepest end of the juvenile justice system have high rates of trauma, mental disorders and other risk factors, as well as low rates of educational attainment and success. OYA programming has increasingly focused on the underlying risk factors that youth in their custody have brought with them. This work not only benefits youth who need specialized services and supports but it will ultimately benefit communities by reducing the risk of re-offense as youth transition back to our communities and off of supervision.

Through the Juvenile Justice Information System (JJIS), Oregon has one of the richest and most robust data sets on youth offenders in the country. YRJ is particularly excited about the potential for OYA's Youth Reformation System (YRS) to make data-driven decisions to provide youth the right placements and services at the right time and for the optimal duration. The YRS will allow the Youth Authority to make data-informed decisions, allocate resources efficiently and help youth transition to the community at the junctures when their chances of success are optimal. The YRS will also allow OYA to decide when services are ineffective for individual youth or for youth generally so that they can reduce or discontinue the use of these services. Youth, Rights & Justice urges the committee to appropriate the resources the Oregon Youth Authority needs to continue this critical work.

An independent, not-for-profit law firm, Est. 1975

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