

Dear Co-Chairs Williamson and Shields and Members of the Joint Public Safety Sub-Committee of
Ways and Means:

Thank you for your service for our citizens and for our community. I am sorry I am not able to be with you in person to testify on behalf of the budget for the Oregon Youth Authority. I am out of the state at this time, but I would like to express my support for the work that OYA does with the youth in their custody. I know firsthand the good work done at MacLaren, since I, along with others, have mentored several young men there and have frequently met with these young men at the facility.

Many of these youth come into custody from dysfunctional circumstances, with severe emotional issues, and have committed serious crimes. For some of these youth, for the first time, they have a safe place to sleep and regular meals every day, along with disciplines of life. They hold the young men accountable and hold them to high standards. They also support them and provide encouragement to them. MacLaren becomes a home for these young men.

At MacLaren, they have a stable environment, medical care, mental health services, and treatment programs. All of these services cost money, yet they are a good investment in these youth. OYA provides a win-win: the transformation of lives, and return of the public's investment in these youth to become productive citizens in our communities.

For the young men willing to change their lives and better themselves, they are also given educational opportunities. I have seen firsthand how some of these young men turn their lives around and work hard for a better future for themselves. I—and others—have invested in their education after they have earned high school degrees.

The vision statement of OYA says that others will be treated with "fairness, dignity and compassion." I have found this to be true from all the staff at OYA, starting at the top with Director Pakseresht Fariborz to the amazing Diane Hass, Transition Specialist, who has become one of my more expensive friends! I say this with a smile on my face. When asked to support the post-high school education of OYA youth, many have contributed dollars for this initiative.

With the dedicated staff and excellent programs at MacLaren, many of these young people grow up to become very fine and caring people. My hope is that in the future, because of the good work that OYA does, we can build on the investment we have made in the young men who do change and allow them to work or continue their education after leaving MacLaren, instead of sending them to prison under mandatory sentencing. The most recent example of this is Sang Dao, who obtained his four-year degree, graduating from Portland State University.

Thank you for funding the staff and programs at OYA.

Sincerely,



Dick Withnell
Retired Business Owner