



March 31, 2015

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Good Afternoon, My name is Kelley Story. I am the Women's Program Director for Sponsors, Inc in Eugene, OR. Since 1973, Sponsors has served as a bridge to assist people transitioning back into our community. We offer short term transitional housing for men and women, employment and educational assistance, mentoring, cognitive behavioral programming, case management services, transportation assistance and parenting classes. I am here today, not only as a representative of Sponsors but also as an advocate and representative of the women we serve to testify in support of HB 3503, the Parent Sentencing Alternative.

Women are the fastest growing inmate population in Oregon. The female prison population has grown by over 800% in the last three decades, doubling the growth of the male population. Two thirds of these women are classified as non-violent offenders. While these numbers are significant, a more significant and troubling statistic is how many of these women are actively parenting at the time of their incarceration. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics in their Parents in Prison and their Minor Children report, approximately "65,600 women in federal and state custody reported being the mothers of 147,400 minor children" (2007). These numbers represent an increase of 122% since 1991. According to the same report, prior to incarceration, women were more likely than men to live with their children prior to their incarceration and be the primary caregiver and to be the head of a single-parent household. Seventy seven percent of mothers, nearly three times the number of fathers, reported providing most of the daily care for their child (ren). These statistics are staggering when viewed through the eyes of a child. Imagine waking up and the person who makes your breakfast, gets you ready for your day, meets you when you get home, helps you with your homework, reads to you at night, is there when you are sick and scared, is suddenly no longer available and is entirely removed from your life. To top it off, you cannot talk about where they went or what they are doing there.

The Women's Program staff at Sponsors has witnessed the results of this trauma on children and parents. One year ago, we opened the doors to the RISE (Re-uniting In a Safe Environment) Program. Fulfilling the dream of a previous Women's Program Director, Sponsors, Inc created a safe place where formerly incarcerated women could reunite with their children. In this last year, we have served 10 women and their children. All in all, it has been a positive experience, however, not one without challenges. There is one case in particular, that I believe illustrates the damage done to the bond between mother and child when a Mom is incarcerated. Kathy\*\* entered our program after serving an 8 year sentence for identity theft. She had received a longer sentence than her male counterpart. She had 5 children, three had been given up for adoption, one was in custody with the Oregon Youth Authority and her youngest child had been taken care of by her maternal grandmother, who after nearly 8 years, was tired and had no desire to parent a teenager. Kathy's daughter was transitioned into the program with her quickly and she received consistent support and coaching from the Women's staff and engaged in our Parenting Inside Out Program offered

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onsite. Her daughter spent time with various staff and received daily positive regard from staff and other clients. Despite the safety, support and coaching offered by staff and clients, the struggle to parent her child, meet all the requirements of Community Corrections, Sponsors, treatment and work began to take its toll. When Kathy went to prison, her daughter was 4 years old and playing with dolls. When she returned, she was a 12 year old, pre- adolescent girl and all those vital years had been missed. She had no idea who her daughter was, as a person or as a young woman. After the initial honeymoon period wore off, she found herself dealing with an angry young woman who did not trust her and had deep seated anger and resentments against her mother. The damage to the extended family was significant and left Kathy with very little support, since her sister had also been incarcerated and the family's resources had been stretched to the breaking point. Kathy lasted approximately 90 days with us. At that point, she could no longer manage the competing demands facing her and did not have the stamina to heal the broken relationship with her daughter. She left our program angry and her daughter went to live briefly with her great grandmother before becoming homeless herself and is now in trouble and involved in the youth system.

Children of incarcerated parents are at risk for issues such as anxiety, depression, failure to-thrive, delinquency, and academic problems. These issues result in stressors on our school systems, foster care systems, health systems and juvenile corrections systems. HB 3503 is a smart, fiscally responsible, humane bill that makes sense for our overburdened systems, families, and most importantly, the children who will be able to remain with their parents and avoid the trauma that results in being separated from their primary caregiver.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

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