



Good afternoon Chair Gelser and members of the Senate Human Services Committee. My name is Michael Alexander and I am President and CEO of the Urban League of Portland. Our organization has been advocating employment, education and training and second chances for African Americans and other Oregonians for over 70 years.

Today we are urging support of SB 939, which seeks to extend and fund programs like the Family Preservation Project to assist children of incarcerated parents in maintaining bonds with their parent and addressing issues of intergenerational incarceration.

Our organization is about the release the State of Black Oregon 2015 this May. The report confirms that women are being incarcerated at a faster pace than men, in a pipeline that is well documented for racial disparities. It is estimated that 80% of incarcerated women are mothers, and the majority of them will go back to parenting their children upon release. The research also shows that young people with incarcerated parents are more likely to experience incarceration themselves.

The Family Preservation Project is evidence that working with mothers to provide help and guidance to learn re-entry skills and healthy interaction with their children is an effective intervention to reduce recidivism and break the cycle of intergenerational incarceration.

Nearly half the women involved in the Family Preservation Project identified as a person of color and benefitted from skills development, improved mother-child relationships and communications with their children. Mothers are also encouraged to become actively involved with school- and community based services that directly affect their children's lives. In addition, the program creates re-entry supports such as collaborative relationships within and outside the facility to support reentry, such as housing support, treatment for substance abuse and mental health concerns, employment, and parenting supports once the parent is released. Not one participant in the programs has returned to prison.

The educational achievement, emotional well-being and social skills of the children involved in the program were also markedly improved.

The Department of Corrections has not questioned the effectiveness of the Family Preservation Project, only the sustainability. SB 939 is an innovative proposal to build upon the success of FPP by developing partnerships with the non-profit sector to create and continue to develop programs that work effectively to assist children of incarcerated parents. The ability to contract with community based organizations will also provide an opportunity to increase culturally-specific parenting and children support services, which can help enhance the effective of the program further.

We believe that is the responsibility of all of us to replicate and preserve effective programs that help incarcerated parents and their children to succeed. In order for them to contribute fully to our communities and our state, we must invest in them. Therefore, I urge your support for SB 939.

Submitted March 7, 2015