



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF CLACKAMAS COUNTY

April 29, 2015

House Committee on Judiciary
Rep. Jeff Barker, Chair
Members of the Committee

RE: SB 232, DOC authorization to accept reentry support and services money: SUPPORT

The League of Women Voters of Clackamas County strongly supports SB 232, which authorizes the Department of Corrections to apply for grants from federal or other agencies for the purpose of providing reentry support services. We would like to add to testimony already provided by our state organization, the League of Women Voters of Oregon, at the February 5th Senate Judiciary hearing.

League members in Clackamas County have a particular interest in SB 232 because of our work the past two years with a group of women inmates at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility. These women, all of whom have at least a GED and less than two years on their sentences, attend a Computer Tech class led by Portland Community College instructor Marie Daniels. This class, however, provides much more than computer instruction. It is, in fact, a life skills class with the goal of instilling hope and much-needed confidence to succeed in the outside world. The League was invited by Ms Daniels to provide lessons on civic engagement to help inmates feel more closely tied to their communities upon release. We discussed the importance of voting, the workings of our governmental system, and ways to advocate for themselves in a society that places a stigma on those with felony convictions.

As part of a lesson on the legislative process we brought to the class' attention three bills from this session that would expand educational and reentry opportunities for inmates. SB 232 was one of them. The other two were HB 3119 and HB 3120, introduced by Rep. Julie Parrish. The women studied these bills thoroughly and with great interest. They then wrote heartfelt testimony that tied these bills to their individual experiences and hopes for the future. They were thrilled when Rep. Parrish accepted their invitation and came to Coffee Creek to hear them deliver their testimony on March 31. It was truly moving to witness the excitement they felt to be heard and to know that legislators were working on their behalf.

Of course, these women can't be here today, so I would like to share just a few quotes from what they wrote, regarding the need for increased funding for reentry support and services:

“When I was released the first time I was forced to go back to a county where there was little family support and funding, and because of this I am a recidivism statistic.”

“I am from a small rural community. There is little public transportaton in some areas, none in others, so getting to a job would be very difficult.”

“I have problems with my depression and need to stay on medication, which the county was paying for until they lost their funding. Because of the cost of the medication I chose to self medicate, which brought me to relapse.”

“I live on a reservation and every state treatment facility is 45 miles away. I have to go to treatment at a state certified facility to get my children back. I'm not eligible for treatment here at Coffee Creek. In order to get the treatment I need when I'm released I cannot parole to my home because there are no resources where I live, and I'd need help with transportation and housing.”

On behalf of the League of Women Voters of Clackamas County and the women of Coffee Creek I would like to thank you for this hearing today and to urge passage of SB 232. Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.

Sincerely,

Marge Easley
Co-President

Sonja Kollias
Co-President

Nancy Murray
Board Member