



Oregon Coalition for Safety and Savings
 Individuals and Organizations Working Together to Find Better Ways to Fight Crime

Coalition Co-Chairs
 Senator Arnie Roblan
 Senator Jackie Winters
 Representative Jennifer Williamson
 Representative Chris Gorsek

SB 5506
Support \$53 million for Justice Reinvestment

ALBANY
Democrat-Herald

Editorial: Don't short-change community corrections

From the Desk of
**Representative
 Andy Olson**

AO

April 13, 2015

This year's session of the Oregon Legislature is on the verge of short-circuiting a vital experiment in community corrections.

It's a development that, in the short run, could leave local governments scrambling to find the resources needed to keep community corrections programs running properly. In the long run, this could be an excellent example of short-sighted thinking that will cost the state millions of dollars — and could ensure that our corrections system will be a financial millstone for generations.

In the 2013 session, a brave coalition of lawmakers, including Albany Rep. Andy Olson, led an effort to shorten sentences for some crimes and let certain low-risk inmates out a couple of months early. (We say "brave" because anyone involved with these efforts ran the risk of being labeled "soft on crime" in election attack ads, even though no one would believe that claim in the case of Olson, a retired Oregon State Police officer.)

The idea was to try to slow or perhaps even stop the overall growth in the number of inmates sentenced to state prisons — the most expensive option in the corrections spectrum. Money saved by not providing additional prison beds would be invested in community programs, which are not only more less expensive but generally more effective in terms of reducing recidivism. The community programs could include items such as beefed-up probation, housing, education, counseling and treatment for addiction or mental-health issues.

The hope was to cap the state inmate population at about 14,600 inmates for five years. As of April 1, Oregon had 14,634 inmates in prison, so at least we're in the ballpark.

And state corrections officials have said the changes are on track to save nearly \$58.5 million during the next two-year budget cycle by delaying the opening of a mothballed prison in Madras and delaying the construction of a prison in Junction City.

Shannon Wight, Deputy Director | Partnership for Safety and Justice
 C: 503.869.6708 | O: 503.335.8449, ext. 210
shannon@safetyandjustice.org





Oregon Coalition for Safety and Savings

Individuals and Organizations Working Together to Find Better Ways to Fight Crime

Coalition Co-Chairs

Senator Arnie Roblan

Senator Jackie Winters

Representative Jennifer Williamson

Representative Chris Gorsek

Before he resigned in February, former Gov. John Kitzhaber proposed spending all \$58.5 million on grants to counties for justice reinvestment programs.

Now, though, legislative leaders say that figure is unrealistic: House Speaker Tina Kotek said Kitzhaber's budget did the state a "disservice by putting a number out there that we didn't think we could achieve." Legislative leaders say a more realistic number might be \$20 million, although they hope to find additional money.

Underfunding the community programs seems to be a quick path to failure. If the community corrections programs fail now, the next step will be to spend again on new beds in prisons. The phrase that comes to mind is "penny wise and pound foolish."

Democrats in the Legislature are hoping that next month's revenue forecast gives them some extra cash, but already have pledged to give 40 percent of any additional money to K-12 education.

Let's hope they can find some table scraps — ideally, about \$40 million worth, if not more. Or they should start saving up for the inevitable result: A new spending spree on prisons. (mm)

Shannon Wight, Deputy Director | Partnership for Safety and
Justice

C: 503.869.6708 | O: 503.335.8449, ext. 210

shannon@safetyandjustice.org

