

February 15, 2017

The Honorable Jackie Winters, Co-Chair
The Honorable Duane Stark, Co-Chair
Members of the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety
900 Court Street
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chairs and members of the Committee:

I am writing to urge you to pass SB 5042, the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) budget and bond funding for the continuation of OYA's 10-Year facilities plan.

My perspective is somewhat unique: I have worked in the adult criminal justice system for over 25 years – I've been a criminal defense attorney for 16 years.

Additionally, my husband and I are about to become foster parents to a child in OYA custody. We have completed the certification process and will be welcoming a child soon.

While we have wanted to be foster parents for many years we were simply unwilling to move forward with a DHS placement. We have a young child who is our priority and sadly DHS does not provide the staffing and resources that would give us the assurance we would need to move forward.

The OYA foster program is the complete opposite and it is BECAUSE of the professional support system in place within the agency that we enthusiastically became certified. We have been so impressed with OYA; we know that when our journey begins we will have the ongoing support we need.

As a criminal lawyer, I know first-hand that when we invest in our youth, particularly our most vulnerable youth, the citizens of Oregon benefit. The empirical data is there: OYA's established educational, vocational and therapeutic programs produce young people who enter society ready to take part in a productive, healthy, crime-free life. Their existing model reduces victimization and reduces taxpayer expense.

I represent a 23-year-old man who is serving a life sentence for Murder. He was 18 when the homicide occurred. This young man came to the US as a Muslim Asylum refugee who experienced the horrible atrocities of war including the deaths of three older brothers. Unfortunately, life did not improve much once arriving in the US. Like many of our youth who end up in the system, he witnessed his mother endure horrible physical violence at the hands of his father.

My client is a bright, respectful young man. I know that his outcome would have been different had he ended up under OYA jurisdiction as a juvenile. I'm confident that OYA would have saved his future.

For all Oregonians, please ensure that their budget is maintained.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'ER', written in a cursive style.

Edie Rogoway Van Ness
503.750.3480
Multnomah County resident