

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:

This letter is in support of SB 5042, the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) budget and bond funding for the continuation of OYA's 10-Year Strategic Facilities Plan. OYA protects the public by holding youth accountable and providing a safe environment for evidenced-based treatment services, education and reformation.

I have been a volunteer with OYA for the past two years and I also volunteer with Lane County Juvenile Detention, where I have been for about five years. As an OYA volunteer, I go to Hillcrest one Sunday a month and provide church services for youth on four different units. I am also currently volunteering at MacLaren, meeting one-on-one with a youth that I have been mentoring and working with for about two years now. In my experience in doing this, I have seen the difference some of the programs are making with the youth.

A few years ago I met a young man who I'll call Thomas. Thomas is a great kid and I enjoyed meeting with him and talking with him. He was in OYA because of gang-related activities and selling drugs. I was talking with him one day and said "Thomas, why in the world are you in a gang?" His reply, "Shelley, it's the only family I have." This is true for so many of the youth I speak with. They come from families that are very broken or even nonexistent. Once they are in the OYA system, they have an opportunity to complete schooling, receive counseling, learn a job, learn life skills, attend college, etc. In short, they learn those things that aren't available to them because of their family situation. We must look to reformation of youth and not just punishment. In the long run, it will prove, I believe, beneficial not just to the youth, but to the community, with less recidivism and with youth who then are more productive members of society.

Over the last budget cycle, and with the support of the Legislature, OYA has redeployed its existing funding to move forward implementation of the Youth Reformation System, a predictive analysis model to inform decisions at all levels of Oregon's juvenile justice system. The model uses juvenile data in Oregon's unique Juvenile Justice Information System to create better outcomes for youth in terms of returning to society ready to take part in a productive, healthy, crime-free life. The model, in turn, reduces victimization and reduces taxpayer expense.

OYA has also continued and enhanced its comprehensive culture change initiative known as Positive Human Development. PHD is Oregon's strength based take on the developmental model of Juvenile Justice, a nationally recognized best practice. Under the PHD approach high expectations and accountability are the outgrowth of safety and security and caring and supportive relationships. Maintaining funding levels for OYA will help the agency continue these transformational efforts to the benefit of the youth they serve and the safety of the public.

Finally, OYA, pursuant to legislative direction in the 2013 session, began implementation of its 10 year facilities strategic plan that is consolidating and updating physical environments that

serve Oregon's most at risk youth. These projects bring the agency's physical environments in line with best practices that research shows deliver positive outcomes for youth and public safety.

I urge to you do everything you can to help continue OYA's momentum. It is imperative that the state maintain the OYA budget for public safety and reformation and allow OYA to continue the work its doing that will continue to protect the public and have meaningful impacts for education, prevention and economic development for Oregon.

Thank you.

Shelley Bohlken, OYA Volunteer