

2/17/2017

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 strongly support fully funding for the Oregon Youth Authority. The Positive Human Development approach is critical in helping youth who have gotten themselves in serious trouble. By fully funding the Oregon Youth Authority, we, the state of Oregon can both help these youth become successful members of our community and show the world the value that Oregonians place on our youth.

I have volunteered over 1200 hours directly interacting with youth and staff between MacLaren, Hillcrest, and Camp Tillamook over the last 3 1/2 years. This has given me the privilege to see radical improvement in most of the youth I have gotten an opportunity to meet. I have personally seen how supportive programs such as the Hope Partnership (part of Janus Youth Programs) has radically changed the course of many youths' lives. In this program, like many others under the model of Positive Human Development, the youth are shown that they can have a happy, successful future. Having staff and volunteers who remind the youth that they are able to make changes in their lives that will both make life better for themselves and those around them, we can change the future for these youth and the communities that they will be released into.

Significantly reducing the Oregon Youth Authority budget will make the Positive Human Development approach significantly more difficult to continue and improve. The resulting reduction in funding for staff and facilities will result in difficulty attracting and retaining well-qualified people. It is through good relationships with staff and volunteers that youth heal. Every time a youth has told me the story of what brought them to Oregon Youth Authority custody, it has been a story of damaged relationships. The vast majority of the youth I have met clearly understand that they have done something wrong that has resulted in their incarceration. Every youth who I had talked with me about their upbringing also have described significant abuse and neglect. By having staff who both hold them accountable for their behavior and support them in becoming productive, happy adults, Oregonians can change the trajectory of these youth.

Investing in youth is the critical investment in the future of our community. We, as a state, have difficult choices to make. I do not see supporting the next generation, even those who have gotten into trouble, to be a difficult choice. I see it is the obvious choice. Please show Oregon's commitment to its next generation by fully funding the Oregon Youth Authority.

Stephen Arnold, MSW CSWA