

# Youth, Rights & Justice

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

To: Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee for Public Safety, 2017 Oregon Legislative Assembly

From: Mark McKechnie, M.S.W., Executive Director

Date: February 22, 2017

RE: Support for HB 5042: Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) Budget

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Co-Chairs Winters and Stark and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Mark McKechnie, and I am the Executive Director of Youth, Rights & Justice. For nearly 42 years, YRJ attorneys have represented youth in Oregon's juvenile justice system, and YRJ has advocated for policies that promote the success of youth and reduce the likelihood of juvenile crime and recidivism.

Youth, Rights & Justice is pleased to say in 2017 that the Oregon Youth Authority has become a leader among juvenile justice systems in the United States. Through the Youth Reformation System, OYA utilizes 20 years of data to substantially increase the chances that youth in OYA custody receive 'the right services in the right locations for the right amount of time.' This is critically important as it will improve outcomes for youth, reduce reoffending and utilize limited state resources more effectively and efficiently.

We also want to recognize the approach that the OYA leadership has taken to infuse its culture and its services with the principles of Positive Human Development. While juvenile justice systems are intended to hold youth accountable and reduce the chances that they engage in future criminal behavior, many of these systems in the United States have failed miserably at his basic purpose. Too often, they rely too much on punishment and confinement, and they neglect to teach and instill skills and habits that will serve the youth once they are released. Youth are often hampered, not helped, when they become institutionalized. Positive Human Development addresses both the need for accountability in the short-term, as well as the skills and attitudes that all people need to be successful adults.

While much of their work is on the cutting edge of the juvenile justice field, OYA's efforts have been impeded by outdated facilities and insufficient staffing. It is important that the state continue to make progress on OYA's 10-Year Strategic Plan for Facilities. In addition, it is important for OYA to have adequate staffing and personnel who are well-trained in effective methods of interaction and intervention. One example is OYA's effort to reduce the use of isolation. I served on OYA's "Use of Isolation Community Advisory Group." While OYA has made great strides to reduce the frequency and duration of isolation of youth, the agency's staffing and facilities are two of the greatest areas of need that need to be addressed in order to continue to reduce the use of isolation of youth further. OYA staff need to be able to physically separate youth who are in conflict without confining them to isolation rooms, and they need to have staff available who are trained in Collaborative Problem Solving and other conflict-resolution methods that have proven effective.

Youth, Rights & Justice urges the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety to support the Oregon Youth Authority's outstanding efforts in these areas by appropriating sufficient funding.

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