

March 3, 2017

Dear Members of the House Committee on Judiciary,

On behalf of the Oregon Justice Resource Center, I respectfully request your support for HB 2355. The Oregon Work Group on the Prevention of Profiling by Law enforcement has met for the past two years and the Oregon Justice Resource Center pleased with the conclusions that the stakeholders have reached in HB 2355.

The Oregon Justice Resource Center is a public interest law firm that represents currently and formerly incarcerated Oregonians and advocates for criminal justice reform. We work to promote civil rights and improve legal representation for communities that have often been underserved in the past: people living in poverty and people of color among them. We work in collaboration with other, like-minded, organizations to maximize our reach to serve underrepresented populations, to train future public interest lawyers, and to educate our community on civil rights and current civil liberties concerns.

Every day people are targeted based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, and language. While the legislature passed a ban on police profiling in 2015, there is still no structure in place to effectively identify, record and correct any profiling practices by Oregon law enforcement agencies. The data we have on racial and ethnic disparities in Oregon's justice system may be patchy, but what we have so far is not good. For example, a Multnomah County report last year showed people of color experience more negative outcomes at every stage of the criminal justice system than whites. Those problems start with arrest rates where black people are more than four times more likely to be referred to the DA's office by law enforcement. Ensuring that officers capture data on the people they stop is critical to understanding what kinds of profiling may be taking place.

HB 2355 also addresses the collateral consequences of profiling and disparities in conviction rates by reducing the charges for certain drug possession from a felony to a misdemeanor. Felony convictions make it much more difficult for people to build successful lives after incarceration. Basic necessities such as finding a job or housing can become incredibly difficult. Penalizing people so harshly for a drug possession offense is excessive. We need to focus resources on treatment and other support services that will help people deal with their addictions. Oregon's Criminal Justice Commission reveals stark racial and ethnic disparities in convictions for felony drug possession in Oregon, even though national research shows people of different racial groups use drugs at similar rates. Additionally, polling conducted by the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon shows Oregonians strongly support reducing the charges for certain drug possession offenses from felonies to misdemeanors and would be more likely to vote for district attorneys or sheriffs who also support it.

We need to take a closer look not only at what's driving this over-incarceration of all Oregonians but also specifically address racial disparities in our criminal justice system. HB 2355 is a strong

first step to addressing these complicated, difficult and too long ignored issues within our criminal justice system. The Oregon Justice Resource Center supports HB 2355.

Sincerely,

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