



ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS DIRECTORS

SB 16:

Statement of Support for Restorative Justice Program Communications

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Value, Offender
Reformation,
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Crime Prevention,
And Community
Restoration*

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Senate Judiciary Chairman Senator Floyd Prozanski, members of the Oregon Legislative Assembly's Senate Committee on Judiciary, my name is Steve Berger and I am the Director of Washington County Community Corrections. I am providing written testimony on behalf of the Oregon Association of Community Corrections Directors (OACCD).

Consistent best practices in victims' services, community supervision, and close consultation with crime victim advocates and survivors, the OACCD wishes to voice support of SB 16 which seeks to maintain confidentiality of Department of Corrections facilitated dialogue and responsibility letter programs.

Facilitated dialogues and responsibility letters can be very healing experiences for crime victims and transformative ones for offenders. Dialogues enable a crime victim to ask questions of their offender and better understand the circumstances of the crimes against them. For many crime victims, it is difficult to move forward because they are plagued by unanswered questions. Facilitated dialogues are a restorative justice approach to helping crime victims get the honest answers they need for their peace of mind and closure. Similarly, responsibility letters convey accountability and can help all parties move forward.

In order for these restorative methods to be most effective, it is imperative that all parties feel safe to be honest, and witness the honesty, without fear that the communication will be used against anyone. Where the criminal justice system rests on resolving an offender's crime against the state, restorative justice rests on helping specific victims get the information and support they need to put the crime behind them. For many victims, facilitated honest dialogues and transparent accountability letters result in a more satisfying sense of justice than victims experience through the criminal justice system. Therefore, it is important that the information shared while forming accountability letters and during dialogues be protected and only used for the healing of the person who has been harmed.

Facilitators and other helpers need to be able to assure a "safe container" for these restorative practices and ensure that all involved can speak as freely as possible. They should not be compelled to testify or share the information from this process. Further, they should be supported in ensuring victims get the answers they need and that offenders who are truly accountable have the chance to be honest.

Thank you for your consideration.

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