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The Difference

March 13, 2017

To: Senate Judiciary Committee  
Chair Senator Floyd Prozanski  
Senator Kim Thatcher  
Senator Michael Dembrow  
Senator Dennis Linthicum  
Senator James Manning Jr.

Re: In support of SB 692 (Hearing 3.14.17)

Dear Chair Prozanski, Senator Thatcher, Senator Dembrow, Senator Linthicum, and Senator Manning:

As Interim Executive Director and President of the Board of Directors of Better People, a non-profit re-entry treatment program in the Portland Metro area, I am representing my organization in strong support of SB 692. Better People works with individuals in Oregon who are reentering our communities from incarceration. Support at the beginning of their move into jail or prison would ease their re-entry process considerably and strengthen support for them to regain a footing as productive citizens vs. recidivating.

Almost everyone incarcerated in Oregon returns to the community at some point. The goal of this project is to take simple, inexpensive, practical and preventive measures prior to incarceration that will reduce chances of later recidivism. This will increase the chances of people being able to return to the community, become a contributing citizen, and more likely become a responsible spouse and parent.

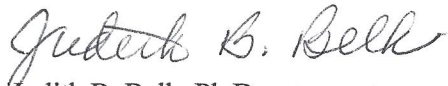
Most of these simple measures, when **not** performed, turn into impossibly complex barriers to success on re-entry. For example, if a contract or lease is not terminated before a person is incarcerated and obligations are not put on hold, then the latter will build, double and accrue interest or penalties while the person is incarcerated. This may result in defaults, being sent to collections and destroying people's credit and potential. If these holds are not discovered and resolved, they can prevent access to transitional leave and proper re-entry planning. If documents are not properly secured, they can be difficult or impossible to replace. This often results in identify theft impossible to unravel.

This bill will fund a **pre-entry** pilot program for Multnomah, Washington and Douglas Counties that will provide access to a social worker for people being sentenced. The social worker will help clients make arrangements to suspend or defer obligations while incarcerated to protect credit, avoid debt, and reduce multiple barriers to successful reentry—what we all want and which our society greatly needs.

This pilot will assure that a legal structure is in place for the security of family and children; put financial obligations and benefits on hold to avoid bad credit history or accruing unnecessary additional debt such as child support, student loans, etc.; secure valuable, difficult to replace documents (driver's license, birth certificate, debit and credit cards); resolve court holds and detainers; terminate rental agreements to avoid eviction on rental history; and inform employers of the situation in order to avoid negative work history.

A relatively small investment at the front end of this proposed system will translate into major savings later, not just money but saving lives as well. With appropriate screening to assist people to get their affairs in order before incarceration, they are less likely to emerge from incarceration facing an abundance of urgent and difficult-to-solve problems. Avoiding these problems boosts their chances of successfully reintegrating and moving forward to stay connected to P.O.'s, find housing, obtain a job, pay bills and build a positive structure for their lives.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Judith B. Belk".

Judith B. Belk, Ph.D.  
Interim Executive Director  
Better People