

YWCA IS ON A MISSION

March 14, 2017

Dear Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the YWCA of Greater Portland, I respectfully request your support for SB 689 and SB 692. As one of the oldest and largest women's organizations in the nation, with 2.6 million members across 300 local associations, the YWCA of Greater Portland has been serving the Portland community for over 110 years, while evolving to meet the changing needs of the women we serve. Today the YWCA's focus remains on empowering women and their families to achieve safety, opportunity, and independence.

SB 689

Through our work administering the Family Preservation Project (FPP), the YWCA of Greater Portland has worked firsthand with women who have struggled to successfully re-enter society after incarceration. We know that housing, employment, health care, and addiction related issues are among the biggest barriers to successful re-entry, but we also know, and research bears out, that strengthening family relationships is the leading predictor of successful re-entry. Having a task force focused on the issues confronted by men and women after they have served their sentence has proven to be a critical component in creating urgency and action in addressing these issues.

As it moves forward, we would urge that the Task Force on Reentry, Employment and Housing continue to seek out feedback and involvement from both men and women who were formerly incarcerated. In fact, we believe the Task Force would be well-served by specifically calling for members that were formerly incarcerated, providing the type of first-hand experience that can be lacking in policy development and implementation around re-entry issues.

SB 692

The YWCA of Greater Portland supports a pre-entry pilot, again based on our experience with the Family Preservation Project (FPP). As we work with incarcerated mothers, their children and their caregivers, the collateral damage incurred based on issues that weren't addressed at the front end is clearly evident. Too often parents don't have the ability to get their affairs in order regarding their children, like power of attorney and housing, and these can have huge and lasting impacts on the child and parent. Right now FPP provides a mechanism for the women we work with to address those things that have compounded over time: items in collection, issues with their driver's license, fees and restitution, and, most importantly, the care and well-being of their children.

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However, a majority of people currently incarcerated do not have this opportunity and we fully support a pilot project that begins prior to an individual's prison sentence to demonstrate the need and effectiveness of this approach.

Every incarcerated individual is in a different set of circumstances and those circumstances are not static. As a result, we can envision a continuum of support between efforts to address as many issues as possible at the front end and continued treatment, education, and therapy as incarcerated individuals complete their sentences.

We hope that you will join us in supporting the success of formerly incarcerated men, women, and their families by voting yes on SBs 689 and 692.

Thank you,

Susan Stoltenberg
CEO, YWCA of Greater Portland