



Legislative Testimony

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

March 20, 2017

The Honorable Jackie Winters, Co-Chair
The Honorable Duane Stark, Co-Chair
Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety

RE: Research and Evaluation in Safety, Health, and Wellness in the Criminal Justice System

Co-Chair Winters, Co-Chair Stark, and members of the Ways and Means Public Safety Subcommittee, I am Daryl Borello, Assistant Director of the Administrative Services Division for the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC).

I am here before you today to request authority for the department's submission of a federal grant application to the U.S. Department of Justice in the amount of \$750,000.

Over the last five years, through proactive partnerships with Oregon Health and Science University and Portland State University, we have gathered staggering statistics about the well-being of our correctional officers. One in three have symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and those exhibiting PTSD-related symptoms have high levels of tobacco and alcohol use, more health problems, and a high numbers of doctor visits and workday absences. Research has also revealed alarming rates of high cholesterol, triglycerides, blood pressure, and body mass index among correctional officers. The effects of this acute stress lead to declining health, high divorce rates, alcoholism, suicide, and shortened life-span.

Staff wellness is our agency's top strategic initiative, for good reason. Nationally, research on correctional staff well-being is beginning to develop, and we are encouraged that the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) is seeking to better understand this important and troubling aspect of the criminal justice system. Oregon leads the way in addressing correctional staff wellness. Director Peters is the chair of the wellness efforts for both the NIC and the Association of State Correctional Administrators. Her national role, coupled with our extensive research and organizational efforts thus far on staff wellness, makes us well poised to put forth a significant research application.

Our grant submission proposes a mix-method randomized control study of 450 staff within our six medium- and maximum-security prisons. The purpose of the study is to measure the effects of two acute stress interventions: mindfulness based emotional intelligence and wearable biofeedback technology.

- 150 staff will participate in our mindfulness based emotional intelligence program and utilize a wearable biofeedback device.
- 150 staff will receive training in simple self-regulation techniques and utilize a wearable biofeedback device.
- The remaining 150 staff will be placed in the control group, receiving no interventions.

All study participants will receive salivary cortisol testing, complete surveys, and provide additional qualitative and quantitative data. In addition, we will track any changes in participant absenteeism and measure whether rates of unusual incidents in each of the prisons impact participant stress markers.

Again, staff wellness is our top strategic initiative, foremost because we care deeply about the well-being of our employees. However, more than a worthy end to itself, correctional staff wellness is necessary for achieving our mission to keep the public safe and rehabilitate those in our custody. The difficult task of rehabilitating Oregon's adults in custody is all the more challenging when our staff who care for and treat those adults are themselves riddled with stress, illness, and addictive behaviors.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Submitted by:

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