

Testimony in Support of HB 2104 and HB 2105

**Submitted to the House Committee on Judiciary,
By Shannon Wight, Executive Director, Partnership for Safety and Justice
March 21, 2017**

Chair Barker and members of the House Judiciary Committee:

Partnership for Safety and Justice (PSJ) is a statewide, non-profit organization that works to reform public safety and criminal justice policy in Oregon. Our primary mission is to ensure that Oregon's public safety dollars are invested in evidenced-based approaches that achieve safe and strong communities through accountability, healing, justice, and equity.

Today we testify in support of the underlying concerns in HB 2104 and HB 2105 – that is, the need to adequately support and compensate the employees of the Department of Corrections.

Department of Corrections employees face an unhealthy system because of a state investment strategy that requires high rates of mandatory overtime. Corrections employees have incredibly stressful and demanding jobs as it is, and mandatory overtime only adds to the challenges of their positions. Mandatory overtime means not having the time necessary to take care of their families, not being able to go on vacation with their kids, and not getting the much-needed downtime to recover from the demands of their jobs. It also leads to unnecessary stress and tension in an environment already rife with stress and mental health issues.

When faced with a large budget deficit and cuts to public employee staffing levels, addictions and mental health services, and victims services, we should be transparent about the State's spending and our priorities. We should not spend limited tax payer dollars on excessively long sentences, especially for nonviolent crimes, and instead should focus funding on what creates a healthy public safety system. We believe that supporting correctional workers through pay and ability to take time off should be a priority when considering public safety spending this biennium.

The Department of Corrections is working toward stated goals to reduce mandatory overtime by 20% over the next 4 years and 40% in 10 years. In order to improve the working conditions of the Corrections employees and the health of the overall public safety system, we need to commit as a system to working toward smart investments that reduce mandatory overtime and adequately support employees.

Thank you for your time and consideration.