

**Testimony in Support of HB 5004**

**Submitted to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
By Shannon Wight, Deputy Director, Partnership for Safety and Justice  
March 23, 2017**

Co-Chairs Winters and Stark, members of the committee:

Partnership of Safety and Justice (PSJ) supports HB 5005. PSJ is a nonprofit organization that advocates for public safety and criminal justice policies in Oregon. We advance solutions to crime that ensure justice, equity, accountability, and healing. We do this by advocating for proven strategies that achieve safe and strong communities, prevent crime, and provide opportunities for both victims and people who commit crimes to rebuild their lives.

We want to begin our testimony by stating that we support the overall direction of Oregon's Department of Corrections and specifically the leadership of Director Peters. In particular, we have been impressed with Director Peters and her team's ongoing commitment to identifying solutions to recent public safety challenges.

In recent years the Department has been a productive partner in moving reforms including Justice Reinvestment in 2013 and the Family Sentencing Alternative in 2015 to address the rising prison population in our state.

Further, as we testified to earlier this week, it is worth mentioning that we are concerned about the use of mandatory overtime and supportive of efforts to decrease overtime and increase time off from these high-stress positions for Department of Corrections staff.

As you have heard since before session began, we are most concerned with the fact that the Department continues to be over-capacity at Coffee Creek Correctional Institute, thus on the brink of opening a second prison for women at a cost of \$17.5 million per biennium, and we also already spent millions to expand capacity at Deer Ridge. While Justice Reinvestment is doing great work in reducing the need for prison bed expansion and needs to be adequately funded to build upon its success, the expansion at Deer Ridge and possible opening of a new women's prison is out of sync with the philosophy of Justice Reinvestment and the intended policy trajectory the legislature set in 2013.

The State's \$1.7 billion budget deficit, which may increase due to impending federal actions,

means that DOC has already cut critical programs, including 140 treatment beds when 70% of our women's prison population and 50% of our men's suffer from addictions and mental health issues. As you know, we also face cuts to local communities through Justice Reinvestment and Community Corrections.

Particularly given this budget crisis, we hope that this committee will bend the cost curve in Corrections through safe and responsible reductions in the prison population and prioritize local public safety programs, staff health at the Department of Corrections, and drug and alcohol treatment to reduce incarceration and the financial and human costs associated with it.

Over the next few biennia we believe Oregon can end the use of temporary and emergency beds through modest sentencing reforms. Doing so will create savings and a safer environment in our prisons for both staff and those incarcerated and free up dollars to be spent on addictions and mental health treatment, re-entry programs, and greatly needed victim services.

Thank you for your time and consideration.