



BRIDGES  
*to change*

*Creating Hope Through Community*

Joint Way and Means Public Safety Subcommittee

March 23, 2017

Testimony

Thank you Chairs Senator Winters and Represented Stark, members of the committee for the opportunity to meet with you today. My name is Monta Knudson and I am the Executive Director of Bridges to Change and the President of MetroPlus Association of Addiction Peer Professionals. I am here today to speak on behalf of Bridges to Change and our partnerships with Community Corrections.

Through HB 3194 known as the Justice Reinvestment Act, Bridges to Change is a fundamental partner of Community Corrections that provides safe and stable housing, mentorship, access to employment services and stabilized planning for recently released Individuals. The Dept. of Corrections enhanced their re-entry efforts during the last biennium targeting Individuals eligible for Short Term Transitional Leave (STTL). We currently provide services for those eligible for STTL across 5 counties in the state of Oregon.

Successfully transitioning from incarceration is not an easy task. The programs that we offer are set up to ease the burden of that transition, build trust with Community Corrections and set the course for long-term success. One thing we provide are recovery mentors which meet with mentee and the parole officer to set the course for the next 90 days. On the first day the mentor takes the mentee to set them up with their housing and help them get engaged in treatment services. They assist them with vital services like SNAP benefits, bus passes, ID and employment services. These are difficult systems to navigate after incarceration. Have you ever tried to get a ID without birth certificate and birth certificate without an ID? This type of reentry engagement removes barriers that tend contribute to frustration and ultimately to recidivism. Reentry programs work!

It should be noted, in a 2017 review by the Criminal Justice Commission, inmates who participate in the STTL program show lower 1-year and 2-year recidivism rates than inmates who were statutorily eligible and did not participate. Specifically:

- The 2-year incarceration rate for the STTL group dropped 17.4% compared to the non-STTL group. This difference is statistically significant;
- The 2-year conviction rate for the STTL group dropped 10.0% compared to the non-STTL group. This difference is statistically significant; and

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- The 2-year arrest rate for the STTL group dropped 4% in the arrest rate, but is not statistically significant

Investments in these programs have proven to impact recidivism, and create savings through cost avoidance which is a huge contributor to our return on investment. I can use myself as an example. I spent 16 years in active addiction and about 10 were incarcerated. I paroled 4 times and the last time I paroled I went to a reentry program in Washington County similar to what I just described. This vital reentry support was what I missed the prior 3 time I transitioned. Today I have 14 year clean and have maintained full-time employment since 2006. Looking at my history, had I not found recovery through that reentry program the majority of my last 14 years would have been incarcerated. What was the ROI for that particular reentry program that saved my life?

In closing, we hire previous incarcerated individuals to do this work. In fact, some of our first STTL participants now work for my organization and with the PO's that once supervised them! Out of my 89 employees, 87 are in recovery and have successfully navigated out of the criminal justice system. Many of these folks have been in similar vital programs. This morning I calculated over 230 combined years of recovery which is huge savings through cost avoidance. In addition, my recovery staff have paid their fair share of taxes calculating over 700k in the last 12 months.

Investing in these program that contribute to avoid future cost is, in my opinion, the criminal justice reform we need to continue to fund. I wish you well on the tough decisions you have ahead of you. Thank you for your time.

Monta Knudson

Executive Director  
Bridges to Change