

April 3, 2017

The Honorable Sara Gelser, Chair
The Honorable Alan Olsen, Vice Chair
Senate Human Services Committee Members

Re: Senate Bill 242

Dear Chair Gelser and Members,

On behalf of the Oregon Justice Resource Center, I respectfully request your support for SB 242.

The Oregon Justice Resource Center (OJRC) is a public interest law firm that represents justice-involved individuals and advocates for criminal justice reform in Oregon. We operate and administer several distinct projects that provide direct legal assistance to Oregonians who would otherwise not have access to legal services.

I have the privilege of directing the OJRC's Women in Prison Project. The goals of the Women in Prison Project are to ensure that the criminal justice system treats women fairly, protects their health and safety, and makes it possible for them to successfully rejoin their communities when they are released. Through this project, I provide civil reentry legal services to women incarcerated in Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCF) and hear directly from incarcerated women and formerly incarcerated women about their intersection with the criminal justice system.

Most of the women incarcerated in CCCF are mothers of minor children. Therefore, it is not surprising that most of the civil reentry legal services that I provide to incarcerated women are related to their relationships with their children – helping women understand their judgments, providing them with advice about parenting time and child custody, and talking women through legal procedures. This work affects how women serve their time in prison and is important for their reentry.

However, to improve the chance of meaningful relationships with their children after release, the most critical work mothers can do while in CCCF is to maintain and reestablish bonds with their children. This critical work can include: having healthy and regular communication with their children and their children's caregivers, being as involved in their children's lives as they can, and working on their own self-development – improving coping skills and developing parenting

skills. This is a tall order for anyone, but for an incarcerated parent it can be close to impossible. The Family Preservation Project fosters this critical work.

For many incarcerated mothers, the Family Preservation Project serves as the only bridge from being disconnected from their children and caregivers to a real opportunity to be a significant part of their children's lives after release. Maintaining family bonds such as those fostered by the Family Preservation Project can help to reduce recidivism for mothers, provide support for caregivers and improve outcomes for children.

We see firsthand the vital needs that the Family Preservation Project fills for incarcerated mothers to be successful after release and for building healthy families in our communities. The Oregon Justice Resource Center urges you to support SB 242.

Sincerely,

Julia Yoshimoto
Attorney and Project Director
Women in Prison Project and Reentry Law Project
Oregon Justice Resource Center