

Rosenberg Corey

From: Marianne Kersten <MKersten@NWFS.org>
Sent: Sunday, April 02, 2017 10:57 PM
To: SHS Exhibits
Subject: Support of Senate Bill 241

Dear Chair Gelser, Vice Chair Olsen and members of the committee,

I am writing you today to pledge my support of Senate Bill 241. I am the program manager for Northwest Family Services Children of Incarcerated Parents Program. Each and every day we see firsthand the profound affects of arrest and incarceration, and the penalty these children are forced to pay is steep. Despite their staggering numbers these children remain a largely invisible population.

Our students come to us with lives that are littered with obstacles and instability including poverty, abuse, neglect, violence, and homelessness and then add to that the shame and stigma of having a parent in prison. Our students have an average ACE score of 9 with some having experienced all 10 of the Adverse Childhood Experience criteria. Our program Youth Solutions Student Mentoring strives to empower these youth through mentorship. We match them with a caring adult who can offers them unconditional support, guidance and a deep emotional connection that is often absent in their lives.

Our mentors walk hand in hand with students overcoming obstacles and reaching goals together. We offer youth constructive options which give them a completely new prospective on what is possible for them. We see miraculous changes in our students because of the intervention a mentor provides. We also connect them to life changing resources such as clothes, music lessons, tutoring, school fees, medical care, and much more. We also take them to visit their incarcerated parent, which for many is their only stable and consistent parental relationship.

Another way we serve this population is through our Big Challenges program, This 8 week long support group presented in Clackamas County Elementary Schools is designed to reduce anxiety and provide support and coping strategies in a school setting. It is truly miraculous to see these young children looking at a group of their peers and realize for the first time that they are not the only one with a parent in prison.

I wish we could offer every child who has an incarcerated parent the safety net our programs provide. However Senate Bill 231 is vital step in implementing policy and securing the much needed funding so that programs like ours can continue to change the lives of our most vulnerable youth. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Marianne Kersten

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