

Kate Brown
Governor



Oregon Commission for Women
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OCFW Testimony in support of SB 242
April 3, 2017, 1 pm, HR D
Senate Committee on Human Services

Chair Gelser, Vice Chair Olsen, and Senators Dembrow, Knopp and Monnes Anderson,

As a member on the Oregon Commission for Women, my fellow commissioners and I wish to be recorded in strong support for SB 241 "Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents." In our state of Oregon approximately 70,000 of our children have the impactful and negative experience of watching a parent be incarcerated. These children not only lose a parent, they undergo tremendous emotional, mental, and psychological trauma by being separated from the people they love and depend on the most.

SB 241 will assign a taskforce of key stakeholders the work of crafting a bill of rights to assure that these children have as positive experience as possible while their father or mother is in prison. These children in the state of Oregon already are at a disadvantage - one in fourteen children will experience the negative impact of watching a parent go to jail, one in eight children live in poverty, and half are under the age of ten years old. Furthermore, the likelihood of these children residing in juvenile detention facilities quadruples. They are, as well, three times more likely to drop out of high school, and African American children are 65% more likely to end up homeless.

Oregon children pay a high price for crimes that they didn't commit. SB 241 ensures that children who have been separated due to a parental incarceration will be protected from further trauma, be informed in an age appropriate manner, be heard and respected, be considered in decision making, be cared for in a way that addresses their emotional needs, just to name a few of its benefits. But most importantly SB 241 gives children the right to speak with, see and touch the incarcerated parent and create a lifelong relationship with this same parent.

As a resident of Eastern Oregon and an educator, I have often watched the suffering and distress children undergo while separated from a parent. SB241 will create a positive impact by providing much needed support and allow organizations and other services to advocate for children, who through no fault of their own are away from their love ones.

As a member of the Oregon Commission for Women and on behalf of my fellow commissioners, we support this transformational bill and hope that you will do the same.

Clara Beas-Fitzgerald
OCFW Commissioner – Hermiston, Oregon

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