



## Oregon District Attorneys Association, Inc.

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### NEWS RELEASE

July 1, 2013

Governor Kitzhaber and legislative leadership have joined together with law enforcement leadership to support a new package of laws that will improve public safety in Oregon. The package is the result of vigorous public debate and discussion, as well as robust negotiations between all the various parts of state and local government.

The Oregon District Attorneys Association feels privileged to have participated in the public process that was designed to analyze the performance of the public safety and criminal justice institutions in our state. Despite the fact that some claimed Oregon needed drastic changes because our prisons were growing at a pace which was out of control and was compromising our education system, and that our sentencing laws were overly harsh as compared to other states, the public debate proved these claims to be without factual basis. Oregon's District Attorneys welcomed this public debate because we knew how well our criminal justice works to protect the public and manage its resources carefully. Furthermore, we knew that Oregon is a much safer place than it was 20 years ago, due in large part to voter approved laws that have strengthened sentences for violent and serious repeat property crime. We knew that Oregon has a very low percentage of criminals in prison for non-violent crime and that Oregon has perhaps the best criminal justice system in the nation. Oregon has benefitted by a public safety debate which has brought these facts to the public's attention.

We have attached a list of facts about Oregon's Criminal justice system which we hope you will have time to review. These facts illustrate how well we are doing in managing these important public safety resources.

However, Oregon's District Attorneys are also firmly committed to working with our partners to continually improve our criminal justice system. In that spirit we have joined with Governor Kitzhaber and legislative leadership to support HB 3194. This bill makes targeted sentencing changes that, while not perfect, will responsibly reduce prison growth in Oregon, which was one of the primary objectives of the Governor's Public Safety Commissions. In addition, HB 3194 makes targeted investments in vigorously tested community programs that will reduce the number of offenders who fail supervision and return to prison. This will only further protect the public and control prison growth. In addition, HB 3194 establishes a new and much more independent process for continuing this public safety discussion into the future, with the establishment of the Public Policy Institute, Justice Reinvestment Committee and Reentry Court steering committees. We remain hopeful that these new

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Doug Harclerod, Executive Director

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independent organizations will be valuable instruments to re-invigorate our public safety discussions with sound facts and independent information upon which all parties can rely.

Finally, Governor Kitzhaber and important legislative leadership have made a commitment to let these new reforms take full effect over time before there are any new efforts to change our fundamental sentencing structure. We have enclosed a copy of their public letter of commitment for your review. We believe this is also good public policy.

We regret that the rhetoric surrounding attacks on voter approved ballot measures reached fever pitch during the past two years, often based upon false or misleading information. Such actions only confuse and frustrate our citizens, and never serve the public interest. We believe HB 3194 is the beginning of a new constructive approach to public safety policy. We look forward to working with our governor and legislative leadership to continue to make our public safety system the very best for our citizens.

### OREGON'S PUBLIC SAFETY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Oregon has the lowest percentage of non-violent offenders in prison in the nation.

Oregon has the second lowest percentage of drug offenders in prison in the nation.

Oregon has the lowest parole recidivism rate in the nation.

Oregon returns the lowest percentage of parolees to prison for supervision violations in the nation.

Oregon's incarceration rate is one of the lowest in the nation. The national prison incarceration rate is 31% higher than our state's rate. The national county jail incarceration rate is 30% higher than our state's rate.

Measure 11 sentences are moderate by national standards. Average prison sentences for comparable violent crime across the nation exceed Measure 11 sentences by a significant amount.

Despite extremely moderate justice policies, Oregon has been the national leader in the reduction of violent crime since Measure 11 passed.

Oregon was the first state in the nation to require evidence-based practices in criminal justice.

Prison growth in Oregon is currently driven almost entirely by state population growth, and not by sentencing policy, as had earlier been contended.

Importantly, Oregon's prisons are no threat to the funding of our education system. Only 2% of Oregon's budget is spent on prisons while over 23% is spent on education and 35% on human services.

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