



So all families can thrive.

April 5, 2017
House Judiciary

RE: Support for House Bill 3380, Family Sentencing Alternative

Dear Chair Barker and members of the committee,

Forward Together supports House Bill 3380, Family Alternative Sentencing, because we believe it leads to strong families and safe communities.

Forward Together is a multi-racial organization that works with community leaders and organizations to transform culture and policy to catalyze social change. Our mission is to ensure that women, youth and families have the power and resources they need to reach their full potential.

Family Alternative Sentencing is a program that works. Passed as a pilot program here in 2015, FSA was built on the idea that by keeping families together, Oregon can break the cycle of crime and increase public safety—creating stronger families and safer communities.

We know that imprisonment tears apart families and dramatically disrupts the lives of children, who themselves are more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice or adult prison systems. More than 70,000 children in Oregon have a parent in prison. As a result of having a parent be incarcerated, 80% of kids need higher levels of services than other children. The impacts of incarceration touch many systems in our state—as you know, over 40% of children in Oregon's foster care system have parent who has been convicted of a felony.

But those are only the quantifiable costs for the state of Oregon. We also know that families bear the burden of costs associated with having a loved one be incarcerated. Forward Together's original research found that families pay both the obvious and the hidden costs of incarceration. For example, many families lose income when a family member is incarcerated, and struggle to meet basic needs while paying fees, supporting their loved one financially and bearing the costs of staying in touch.¹

The vast majority of these costs are borne by women. In 63% of cases in our survey, family members on the outside were primarily responsible for court-related costs associated with conviction. Of the family members primarily responsible for these costs, 83% were women.² Lastly, given the disproportionate rates of incarceration in communities of color in our state—we know that that it's Oregon's families of color, and women of color, who are often responsible for the costs of incarceration that get passed onto families in our state.

Forward Together supported the original legislation in 2015 and supports HB 3380's updates to the program. We believe making pregnant women eligible for the program gives newborns a better chance to bond with their parents during a crucial period. And we want more qualified parents to be reunited with their children as they complete community based treatment. Please pass HB 3380 Family Alternative Sentencing.

¹ Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families (2015)

² Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families (2015)

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