

Co-chairs Winters and Stark and members of the committee,

My name is Barbara Ross, I have been a volunteer with the partnership for Safety and Justice and with Mercy Corps Reentry Transition Center for several years.

I would like to tell you a story about "Alice" a woman I met at the transition center. She was seriously abused as a child, adopted by wonderful parents at age 7, but she was so damaged that she could not function as a normal kid. She quit school, left home, fell into addiction. She was homeless for 8 years. Alice had a baby boy who, thankfully, landed back with Alice's adoptive parents. She went to jail, got out, relapsed went to prison, got out, started using alcohol and meth again. She was kicked out of her housing, back on the streets, it was cold rainy and windy. One day she woke up and said to herself: I can't do this anymore.

She went to NARA, and luckily got into inpatient treatment where she was for 90 days. This time it stuck. She says they saved her life. While she herself is Hispanic she responded to the spirituality and the rituals of the Native American approach. She has now been clean for over a year.

She completed a 90 day pre construction training program through the National Urban Housing and Economic Community Development Agency. She got a HOPE grant for housing through a national program designed to move homeless people off the streets.

She has completed an internship at the transition center and is now employed part time doing catering. She is completing her GED and hopes to go to PCC soon. Her relationship with her adoptive parents is now good. She has earned their trust after years of disappointment. Her son, now in the seventh grade visits regularly and is doing well in school.

Alice is healthy, optimistic, personable, and talented. She says she has no temptation at all to go back to her old life. She is living proof that addicted persons can change if they get the structure, support and treatment that they need. She sets goals and then works to achieve them. When you talk to her it is easy to feel confident that she will be successful.

What do we learn from her story? First we need to believe that homeless addicted persons can be changed. Second, we need to ask, can people like Alice be diverted into the Justice Reinvestment program, thereby avoiding the cost of incarceration altogether? At \$97 a day Oregon spent about \$53,00 to keep her behind bars for a year and a half. Community care only costs a third as much. I can't personally say this would have been right for Alice because I was not there. However, from a policy and cost perspective we need to explore every opportunity to save prison costs as long as the structure and the programming are there to assure that offenders can safely be served in the community.

Through in depth, research guided assessment we can evaluate each offender's needs and the risk they pose to the community. Through intensive supervision we can hold them accountable. By skillful treatment we can turn back the stubborn hold of addiction. And in the end, frayed relationships with relatives can be mended and children reunited with their parents.

In the long run we need to expand Justice reinvestment, not shrink it. We need to be investing in the kinds of services that reduce costs and saves lives.

Multnomah County has proven that Justice Reinvestment works: Their prison usage is down 28% since 2014.

I know you have heard these figures before, but I will say them again.

For an 8.1 million dollar investment in the 2015-17 biennium, MCJRP has reduced prison operating costs by \$14 million. The increased use of short term transitional leave has allowed the Multnomah Department of Corrections to avoid spending another 3.2 million in operating costs. Subtracting the MCJRP investment of \$8.1 million from the total of 417.2 million in DOC costs avoided, the program has resulted in the state spending 49.1 million less this biennium and has bolstered the statewide effort to avoid the immediate cost of constructing an expensive new prison. And this is just Multnomah County.

Justice reinvestment participants have similar or better recidivism compared to groups of offenders from

earlier years. There is absolutely no evidence that Justice Reinvestment is making communities less safe. These individuals are working, paying taxes, attending treatment programs paying attention to their health and caring for their children.

Multnomah county is proving that Justice Reinvestment saves money without compromising safety.

Other counties across the state are crafting approaches to hold offenders accountable and at the same time keep them in the community. Each county has had to develop a mix of programs that meet their unique circumstances to effectively reduce the need to use expensive state prison beds.

The Family Sentencing Alternative program is another opportunity to keep families together, improve parenting skills, avoid the costs of foster care as well as incarceration. The initial results are encouraging so that program should also be continued.

I would like to add one other word of caution. While community wrap around services are much cheaper than prison, these programs are not free. It is absolutely essential that we keep investing in the supervision, treatment, mental health care, and supported housing that have allowed these participants to succeed. Each person needs structure, supervision, and compassionate support to overcome their unique challenges. If we fail to provide quality programing, we cannot expect the same results.

Everyone has to work together. In addition to paid staff in community corrections and treatment professionals, family members, community volunteers, and the faith community can all lend their support as the offender works to meet the responsibilities of a new life.

This is not easy, but it is possible. Leaders in Multnomah County and individuals like Alice are proving that courage, determination and smart planning are paying off.

We can't afford to quit now.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

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