



Service Employees International Union, Local 503, OPEU

May 25, 2017

House Rules Chair Rep Jennifer Williamson ; Vice Chair Rep Mike McLane and members of the Committee:

My name is Gloria Soja and I live in Salem. I work for Oregon Youth Authority and am an SEIU represented employee –proudly serving our Local 415 as the Secretary/Treasurer.

I am writing in support of HB 3078 the Safety and Savings Act - a bill that is a forward thinking piece of legislation that modifies eligibility for the Family Sentencing Alternative Pilot Program. Others will discuss the mechanics of the bill but I want you to know that SEIU has endorsed this effort as we see the legislature having a really great opportunity - through HB 3078 - to target our public safety dollars to local communities to hold people accountable and actually address the root causes of addiction and addiction-driven crime, instead of spending \$17.5 million on a new women’s prison.

I write to share my experiences that as a corrections officer in a woman’s prison I saw first-hand, the impact of incarceration on families. There is something horrific about watching a young boy being dragged, kicking and screaming, out of a visitation room by a beleaguered relative. His mother's crime - possession of a substance most states have now declared legal. Or having a four year old see you in uniform and automatically turn around and raise his arms in preparation for the pat search that is about to happen. Mom was convicted on bad cheques - which she wrote at the direction of the person pimping her out. Justifiable? Hardly.

The majority of incarcerated women are addicts ; mothers and survivors of violent crime. Instead of providing treatment and programming that would allow these women to be successful, we separate them from their families and their access to drugs/alcohol, secure them in a life of 24/7 monitoring and order, and declare them "rehabilitated" when their time is up. But we have done nothing to provide positive coping mechanisms that will help them deal with the chaos they return to - the chaos of living in the world. True restorative justice doesn't and can't happen within the four walls of another prison. It has to happen in the community.

Yes, there are some in prison who truly do need to be there. But the majority of the people I encountered in my time as a correctional officer would have been better served through community based programs. Justice reinvestment matters. Reducing sentences and investing money in addiction and mental health treatment services makes sense. Thank you.

Gloria Soja , Salem Oregon
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