



Marion County

OREGON

Board of Commissioners

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June 2, 2017

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Sam Brentano
Janet Carlson
Kevin Cameron

Senator Jackie Winters, Co-Chair
Representative Duane Stark, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Ways & Means
Subcommittee on Public Safety
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support HB 3067-A

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

John Lattimer

Dear Co-Chairs Winters, Stark, and Committee Members:

The Marion County Board of Commissioners strongly urges your support of HB 3067-A creating a pilot CourtCare program to be located in the Marion and Polk county courthouses.

CourtCare will offer free, licensed, quality care for children of caregivers who must attend legal proceedings or complete paperwork at either the Marion or Polk courthouse. Currently, children brought to the courthouse are either allowed to remain in courtrooms or asked to sit unattended in hallways. In the courtroom, children are exposed to upset adults in conflict situations, language involving family violence and criminal behavior, and sometimes witness parents being taken into custody.

In the fall of 2015, Marion County enlisted Alliance for HOPE International to evaluate Marion County's system of victim services, involving the circuit court, Center for Hope and Safety, Liberty House (child abuse assessment center) and Marion County District Attorney's Office Victim Services Division. Mr. Casey Gwinn, Alliance for HOPE International president, led the evaluation team. While Marion County has a reputation for strong collaborations and high quality services for victims, we found there were victims who fell through the cracks.

The Alliance team encountered a frightening situation while observing a circuit court hearing. A woman who was requesting a restraining order said that her ex-husband, a veteran who had done five tours of duty in Iraq and suffered from PTSD, showed up on her doorstep, unannounced, asking for a place to stay. The woman said she told him that he could stay, but only if he first sought psychiatric services. The veteran was then admitted to the hospital, but released after a few hours. The woman no longer

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knew his whereabouts and said she feared for her safety, since her ex-husband had twice strangled her until she was unconscious. In granting the restraining order, the judge asked if the woman had created a safety plan and urged her several times to connect with advocates from the Center for Hope and Safety. The woman declined, noting that she had been waiting at the court since morning to fill out the paperwork and attend the hearing and had left her children at home alone all day. She needed to quickly return home and said she couldn't afford to take the time to meet with an advocate.

Fortunately, the Alliance team was able to follow up with this woman during a ride-along with the Salem PD that same evening, check on her safety and offer her resources. However, this story offers a poignant example of the difficult choices people who are in harm's way must make when child care is not readily available.

Since the Alliance evaluation report was released, Marion County has implemented a number of service improvements for crime victims. However, gaps still exist, one of which is child care in the courts. Jurisdictions such as Multnomah County that already have CourtCare have found it a vital resource for protecting children and a key to ensuring access to justice for low-income families needing assistance to exercise their legal rights. CourtCare reduces court disruptions and the number of proceedings that need to be rescheduled.

As per HB 3067-A, it should be noted that both Marion and Polk county courts would house, but not operate, the CourtCare program. The program would be funded, managed and administered by a non-profit entity.

The Marion County Board of Commissioners urges your support of HB 3067-A.

Sincerely,

MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



Samuel A. Brentano, Chair



Janet Carlson, Vice Chair



Kevin Cameron, Commissioner