

Kate Brown
Governor



Oregon Commission for Women
"Advocating Equality and Diversity"
1819 SW 5th Ave., Portland, OR 97201
O 503.302.9725/F 503.473.8519
Email: oaco.mail@oregon.gov
Website:
www.oregon.gov/Women

Testimony in support of HB 3078A
June 6, 2017, Hearing Room H-170, 3:00 pm
Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety

Co-Chairs Sen. Winters and Rep. Stark, and members Sen. Frederick, Sen. Steiner Hayward, Rep. Barker, Rep. Huffman, Rep. Piluso, and Rep. Sanchez:

The Oregon Commission for Women, where we serve as equity and justice advocates for all women in Oregon, is in support of the Safety and Savings Act, HB 3078A.

Oregon is strongly considering building, opening, and operating an additional women's prison as a solution to address the rising rates of prison sentencing among women. Women's incarceration rates have risen 22% from 2007 to 2015. The real problem is that the majority of these women, 70% in 2015, are being convicted of addiction-driven crimes, primarily drug and property crime offenses. Additionally, 75% of women sent to prison are mothers, which means children throughout the state are separated from their primary caregiver. Consequently, Oregon has proportionately excessive sentences for women which are severely impacting their children and families. Our state is in a \$1.7 billion deficit, and opening a new women's prison would cost an additional \$17.5 million every biennium. This social justice issue impacts the state's financial outlook.

We certainly support solutions that will hold the women accountable for their crimes but suggest that women's trauma and/or mental health issues be considered at the time of sentencing. Traditional incarceration will not solve these underlying mental and physical problems that these women face. HB 3078A identifies cost drivers in our correction system and identifies important options so that we do not have to open a new women's prison this session or for the next 10 years. These alternative solutions described below would more effectively achieve accountability with appropriate sentences at a lower cost, and lower recidivism rates. Housing people in prison for drug and property crimes for excessively long times diminishes our ability to invest in areas that research prove will keep people out of prison and our communities safe.

The Safety and Savings Act serves as an innovative solution to long-term sentencing for women convicted of addiction-driven crimes. This solution results in cost-savings, and provides

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community-based services, addiction treatment, and increased family stability, all of which make our communities safer and stronger. The Safety and Savings Act contains three essential elements:

- 1) It prioritizes treatment services over longer sentences for addiction-driven crime, holding people accountable but ensuring cost savings to better achieve our shared public safety goals.
- 2) It preserves and fixes the family sentencing alternative and expands short term transition leave to reduce recidivism and strengthen families while assuring strong supervision.
- 3) It continues funding Justice Reinvestment and victims' services so that people who've been harmed by crime and those who've been convicted of crime can receive services they need to heal and rebuild their lives.
- 4) It adds study by the Criminal Justice Commission as a key element of understanding and tracking the effect on prison populations and successes in transitioning from the provisions of HB 3078A in implementation.

Thank you for this opportunity to support this bill that focuses on accountability, rehabilitation, and family preservation. As a Commission, we strongly endorse this bill, ask your support for The Safety and Savings Act (HB 3078A), and urge the Committee to move this bill forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Adrienne C. Ochs".

Adrienne C. Ochs, Ph.D., OCFW Commissioner