

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 5005
Submitted to the Public Safety Subcommittee of Ways and Means
By Shannon Wight, Deputy Director, Partnership for Safety and Justice
February 14, 2017

Co-chairs Winters and Stark and Members of the Committee:

My name is Shannon Wight and I am the Deputy Director at Partnership for Safety and Justice. Partnership of Safety and Justice is a statewide, non-profit organization that has worked in Oregon for since 1999. We advance policy solutions to crime that ensure justice, equity, accountability, and healing to achieve safe and strong communities.

Those values drive our work, which is why I am here today on behalf of Partnership for Safety and Justice in support of HB 5506. In particular, we are supporting a minimum investment of \$41.3 million allocation for Justice Reinvestment, 10% of which will be allocated to community-based victim services.

We are acutely aware of the challenges you face with the \$1.8 billion budget deficit. In fact, given that deficit, it's especially important that you fund Justice Reinvestment at least at the current services level of \$41.3 million. Justice Reinvestment is saving the state money by investing in local communities for services that prevent the need for new prisons to be opened and built in Oregon. In this coming biennium alone, the avoided operational costs are estimated to be \$52.7 million and \$140 million in costs associated with building a new prison.

Justice Reinvestment is a cornerstone of Oregon's public safety policy. Passed during the 2013 legislative session, PSJ advocated for Justice Reinvestment and continues to support its funding and successful implementation. As I already mentioned, it has effectively saved the state almost \$200 million, but Justice Reinvestment is more than just averted costs: the funds grow access to addiction and mental health treatment, expand community-based victim services, and at the same time create jobs to provide the services. Lives are being changed and communities are safer because of Justice Reinvestment.

As you've heard, the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission does an excellent job tracking and monitoring the use of Justice Reinvestment funds at the county level. The CJC shares valuable information and metrics with the counties to help give direction on best practices and areas of improvement. For example, with assistance from the CJC, Lane and Marion Counties have worked hard and have improved their process of safely reducing the number of people sent to prison.

We still face, and need to address, overpopulation in the women's prison due to excessive drug and property crime sentencing, but reducing Justice Reinvestment funds at this critical time will only create the need for more prison beds in both the male and female prisons. To continue the success of Justice Reinvestment, counties need ongoing financial commitment from the legislature.

There is a striking example that is instructive as we consider future investments for justice reform. In the 1970's in Oregon and across the country state's realized that large-scale mental hospitals were not the appropriate treatment for many of the mentally ill. Hospitals closed with promises of investments in smaller, community-based treatment centers. Those investments were never fully realized. Our prisons and jails and now filled with individuals who struggle with mental illness. We must not make that same mistake as we chart this new public safety course.

Passing Justice Reinvestment was step one; now Oregonians are looking to you to continue the needed investments for its ongoing success. We are asking that you minimally fund the Justice Reinvestment Grant Program at its current service level of \$41.3 to ensure a public safety system that works and gives us the best return on our investment.