

The Honorable Jackie Winters, Co-Chair  
The Honorable Duane Stark, Co-Chair  
Members of the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety  
900 Court St.  
Salem, OR 97301

February 21, 2017

Greetings Senator Winters ; Representative Stark and Public Safety Sub-committee members of Ways and Means. My name is Gloria Soja and I live here in Salem. I also work in Salem for Oregon Youth Authority and am an SEIU represented employee –proudly serving our Local 415 as the Secretary/Treasurer. I am testifying today in support of HB 5042 - the OYA budget for the coming biennium.

For just over 9 years – many of which while living in Montana - I worked within the Interstate Compact for Juveniles, spending my time working with juvenile justice agencies across the country to provide continuing supervision for probation and parole youth, and returning runaway youth across state lines. Oregon has a reputation for being on the leading edge of youth reformation. Oregon is known for the quality of services provided as we work to ensure that youth, who encounter the juvenile justice system, are given the best possible chance at future success. Unfortunately, without additional revenue, we will not be able to sustain the level of care we have become known for, nor will we be able to continue to develop new programs and services.

Recently I spent three days at meetings with staff at North coast and Tillamook youth correctional facilities beginning discussions about a possible facility closure. During these meetings I was humbled by the professionalism and grace shown by staff during this difficult time. Not just concerned with their own well-being, they expressed concern for the youth in their facilities who will be devastatingly impacted by the loss of their home, the relationships with staff they have come to know and trust, and the return of uncertainty to their lives. How many of you, when faced with the loss of a job that you love, would remain deeply concerned about youth whom much of society has deemed "the worst"?

Closing facilities and cutting service beds may offer a relatively quick fix to a budget shortfall. But this is much like putting a Band-Aid on a gaping wound. Oregon needs revenue yet we remain 50<sup>th</sup> in corporate taxes. I urge you to adopt tax reforms and other revenue measures to ensure that we are not balancing a budget by penalizing our most vulnerable populations: our youth, our students, and our struggling families.

I know that the decisions before you are incredibly difficult. But, there is a reason that each of you are sitting where you are. Folks voted for you and put our trust in you, and we believe that you will do what is in the best interests of Oregon as a whole. Thank you for working for a better Oregon.

Gloria Soja, Salem, Oregon

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