



## Legislative Testimony

### OREGON DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

February 18, 2019

The Honorable Jennifer Williamson, Chair  
House Committee on Judiciary

#### **Regarding: House Bill 2631**

Chair Williamson and members of the committee I am Heidi Steward, Assistant Director of the Correctional Services Division for the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC). I am providing written testimony on the anticipated impacts of HB 2631 as it relates to the department.

#### **What the Bill Does:**

HB 2631 directs DOC to establish a two-year legal services pilot program for women at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville, Oregon. The purpose would be to assist the women in successfully re-entering and reintegrating into local communities. The program would help those releasing resolve and navigate civil legal needs with the intent of reducing their vulnerability to domestic violence and increasing their ability to obtain employment, housing services, and other benefits.

#### **Background Information:**

DOC provides legal libraries, resources, and supplies at each correctional facility to adequately assure access to the courts. In accordance with our [Oregon Administrative Rule 291-139](#), priority access to legal library resources is given to adults in custody (AICs) raising a legal challenge to their conviction, sentence, or conditions of confinement. Generally, legal counsel is assigned to AICs raising such legal challenges. With limited exception, we lack the resources to prioritize the civil legal matters that are the focus of this proposed pilot. It is our understanding most women in our custody lack the resources needed to obtain legal counsel for these civil matters.

#### **Potential Impacts:**

Should this legislation pass, there is some potential overlap to current re-entry services provided to women that we would need to coordinate with the Oregon Justice Resource Center (OJRC). For example, the department successfully provides important documents for re-entry such as identification, social security cards, and birth certificates. Nearly 70 percent of people leaving DOC custody do so with both a birth certificate and a social security card. Collaboration could occur for the more complicated remaining 30 percent in need of other documentation. DOC also provides a full array of re-entry services and classes and would seek to strengthen those services through this partnership rather than duplicate efforts.

The department does not currently track the specific impacts unresolved civil legal matters have on women's re-entry and reintegration. These barriers were raised by the independent HerStory Oregon Survey conducted by OJRC in partnership with Portland State University. This pilot will likely improve DOC's ability to demonstrate data-driven results. We are optimistic the required evaluation will reflect DOC's ability to provide qualitative analysis of the pilot's success, numbers served, and legal matters resolved.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

*Submitted by:*

Oregon Department of Corrections

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