

Kate Brown
Governor



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House Committee on Judiciary
Testimony in Support of HB 2631
February 18, 2019

Chair House Democratic Leader Williamson, Vice Chair Gorsek, Vice Chair Sprenger and members of the Committee:

The Oregon Commission for Women (OCFW), in its role as advocate for all women in Oregon, and the Oregon Commission for Asian and Pacific Islanders (OCAPIA) strongly support HB 2631. This bill provides targeted legal services for incarcerated women so that the chances they will successfully reenter society will be greatly increased.

Recidivism, the act of returning to prison after serving a sentence, is a common phenomenon among justice-involved women in Oregon. There is a solution. A comprehensive, holistic approach to recidivism rate reduction acknowledges and addresses the many reasons women enter prison in the first place, and the compounding conditions women experience once incarcerated. The complex causes include domestic violence, substance abuse, mental illness, and the lack of familial and social support once incarcerated. HB 2631 provides and will evaluate the outcomes of essential supports for financial, legal, economic, and social services for incarcerated women as they prepare for and experience community reentry.

Failures at the time of reentry have severe economic and social consequences for these women, their families, and the state of Oregon. This modest investment can improve the life of reintegrating women, keep families together and help eliminate the intergenerational cycle of poverty and incarceration that affect so many communities, often disproportionately. For every dollar invested in success at this critical juncture in their lives, the state saves more than ten times as much when failure rates are reduced, including return to prison. For every dollar invested in civil legal assistance to low-income individuals, the state saves between \$3 and \$11. Unfortunately, because of costs, such reentry services, primarily legal in nature, are not available to the majority of incarcerated women upon release. Pro bono legal services are limited. Further, probation and parole requirements rarely address inherent issues women faced prior to sentencing.

The proposed House Bill 2631 funds a 2-year pilot program that will reduce recidivism rates by adding three Oregon Justice Resource Center attorneys to provide civil legal services for incarcerated women that will aid them once released from prison, regardless of their location in the state. The Oregon Justice Resource Center has had a long history of providing civil legal services to women in Oregon Department of Corrections' Coffee Creek Correctional Facility. Services such as child custody, debt management, housing discrimination, and employment assistance will be provided to select women at Coffee Creek prior to release as part of the pilot.

Thank you for the opportunity to support this bill, focused on healing women, restoring communities, and recidivism reduction in Oregon. Along with the large number of Oregonian organizations, ranging from non-profits and churches to businesses, we support and ask your positive consideration for HB2631.

Sincerely,

Dr. Adrienne C. Ochs
Commissioner, OCFW

Dr. Barbara Spencer
Chair, OCFW

Chanpone Sinlapasai-Okamura,
Chair, OCAPIA

OR Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs

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