



**Testimony of Kimberly McCullough, Policy Director
Concerning HB 5541
Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety
March 7, 2019**

Co-Chairs Winters and Piluso, and Members of the Committee:

The American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon¹ appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on HB 5541, which provides the budget for the next two years for Oregon Youth Authority. We urge you to not only support current service level funding for the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA), but to also consider additional funding to assist the agency in its pursuit of programming and services that improve the lives of youth in our juvenile justice system.

For the last several years, OYA's leadership invited the ACLU of Oregon to participate in a stakeholder group to help advise OYA on their efforts to reduce the use of isolation (solitary confinement) in OYA facilities. Our collective work has been a resounding success, leading states around the nation to look to OYA as a model for reform. But this was only possible because OYA was able to access much-needed funding to transform their facilities, programming, and culture.

Working through this process with OYA caused us to realize just how crucial it is to improve staff training and skills to give them better tools for addressing behavioral issues of the youth in their care; to transform facilities into trauma-informed spaces that are more conducive to healthy interactions; and to provide programming and services that help youth learn pro-social and healthy interactions. Because OYA invested in each of these things, they have been able to drastically reduce their use of isolation, and eliminate it entirely as a disciplinary measure (instead, only using isolation when violence has occurred or is imminent).

This is just one example how adequate funding for OYA can improve conditions and outcomes for Oregon's youth. Yes, we would also like to reduce the number of youth living in OYA's correctional facilities, and we support legislation to reduce sentencing for youth.

¹ The American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon (ACLU of Oregon) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to preservation and enhancement of civil liberties and civil rights, with more than 45,000 members and supporters statewide.

Ultimately, we would like to see the vast majority of youth in our justice system receive community-based treatment and programming. However, even when we achieve that goal, it is crucial that we adequately fund OYA and the programming and services that will help our youth thrive and grow.

For these reasons, the ACLU of Oregon urges you to support funding for OYA. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, comments, or concerns.