



Testimony to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Public Safety

March 7, 2019

Re: Governor's 2019-21 OYA Budget, Supporting Funding Continuing Service Level

Honorable Co-Chairs Senator Winters and Representative Piluso and members of the Committee, my name is Pam Patton, I was President of the Coalition of Advocates for Equal Access for Girls for 20 years and for the past 6 years the Coalition's State and National Liaison. The Coalition is a statewide, all-volunteer, non-profit organization with a mission to ensure that the state's 1993 Equal Access Law (ORS 417.270) is implemented and that girls and young women who are involved with the State systems, as the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA), receive equity in access to the gender-specific services, treatment and facilities they need to develop to their full potential. **I am writing today in support of OYA being funded at the Continuing Service Level with a specific focus on this Budget's impact on services and policies for young women.**

To give you a brief history, we have been an active member of OYA's Advisory Committee (currently OYA Partnership Committee) for over 20 years and chaired and participated on past OYA Young Women's Workgroups. During the late 90's the Coalition worked in collaboration with OYA to open in March 1999 OYA's first Young Women's Transition Program (YWTP), the Corvallis House. In 2010 YWTP moved to a site at Oak Creek, which was only permanently funded in 2017. And in February 2008, after 4 years of the Coalition again working in collaboration with OYA the Oak Creek Youth Correctional Facility for young women was opened.

Over recent years OYA has adopted the developmental approach because it recognizes the importance of culturally-responsive and I would say gender-responsive services and of providing youth with appropriate services for mental health and other needs. Reductions in funding could lead to a return to a more one size fits all approach. And let me tell you from my 26 years of work on behalf of girls and a gender-responsive approach when working with girls one size does not fit young women.

Girls in the juvenile justice system are unique and differ from boys substantially. Criminal behavior means something different for girls than boys. Based on the high numbers of adverse childhood experiences and trauma and how they are expressed, girls in closed custody require a unique approach. Majority of female youth are committed to OYA for probation and parole violations. These violations are based on girls engaging in very high-risk behavior that not only places the community at risk, but girls at substantial risk as well.

To give you an overview of the young women in the Oregon Youth Authority facilities, there are currently 53 young women in the Oak Creek Youth Correctional Facility, 11 of these young women are with the Department of Corrections (DOC). Young women represent 12% of the OYA population, they range in age from 14-22 years. The Young Women's Transition Program has 13 young women, 1 is with DOC, they range in age from 16-19 years. Even though females are a small percentage of the population, OYA has adapted a developmental and trauma-informed approach to accommodate the different needs of girls. OYA has remained committed to equity and gender-responsiveness in working with young women. However, **if OYA is not funded at continuing service level, all its progress toward providing the individualized care needed to help youth will be undermined.**

OYA Needs Additional Staff and Programs to Provide Equitable Services to All Populations

OYA has identified 3 areas of need for the developmental approach to continue to progress in providing individualized care. *I will include recommendations (*) in these three areas that specifically impact young women.*

➤ Youth of Color, LGBTQQI Youth, and Other Underserved Youth

The racial and ethnic disparities for females in OYA are comparable to the male population. For the LGBTQQI population in the Oak Creek young women's facility there are two trans gender, gender-nonconforming youth and one youth at YWTP, and because at this age gender identity can be a fluid there can be more youth who identify as non-conforming.

Research suggests that young women are more successful when they receive treatment, education, and other services that create a safe, respectful environment while restoring their power and value as individuals, one that is gender-responsive and trauma-informed and meet their specific developmental, cultural, linguistic, identity and other needs. Continuing service level funding would allow OYA the ability to offer these individualized services.

We support OYA's goal of adding staff to its Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Relations (OIIR) to serve African-American, *Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Latino, and LGBTQQI youth.*

- OIIR is not adequately staffed to provide training support and content expertise to facility and community-based direct service staff employed by partner agencies to help develop competency around equity and culturally responsive services **including training support in gender-responsive and trauma-informed services for young women.*

We support OYA's efforts to use its funds to create innovative programming to underserved youth.*

- Youth in underserved groups often struggle in community placements due to not receiving services appropriate to their cultural, **gender, gender nonconforming,* linguistic, or clinical needs.

We support OYA's goal of hiring a foster care recruiter to increase the diversity of OYA foster families to provide more supportive, individualized options for youth.*

- ****The loss over the last many years of several girls' residential programs has greatly increased the need for additional foster homes that can specifically serve and care for young women. Many of the young women at Oak Creek are virtual orphans – they may have parents, but their parents are unable or unwilling to care for their daughters leaving girls without a family option. The more specialize setting foster homes developed the greater chance OYA can create placements more matched to the young women's needs. This is a relatively low cost/high yield recommendation.***

We support OYA's goal of hiring an HR analyst to specialize in recruiting a more diverse workforce to reflect the youth it serves.*

- A dedicated foster care recruiter would improve OYA's ability to match youth to specific homes based on a variety of factors related to their treatment issues, background, **gender,* race/ethnicity, and primary language. They would also be able to target their efforts to create an array of urban/rural options — and begin to meet an ongoing need for LGBTQQI-friendly homes.

➤ **Mental Health and Other Specialized Needs**

It is crucial that young women receive the right treatment and care designed for them while in custody. However, OYA's current staffing for mental health services and substance abuse treatment is not adequate – staff must triage youth needs and focus primarily on crisis response rather than getting at root causes. But cuts to OYA's continuing service level could challenge even this level of care.

Trauma is the driving force, the root cause of the behaviors that put a girl on a path to Juvenile Justice. While prevalent with boys, for girls, trauma is endemic. In OYA 43% of females (16% of males) are victims of sexual abuse. 29% of females (12% of males) have exhibited past suicidal behavior. **90% of females** (77 percent of males) **have a diagnosed mental health disorder** other than conduct disorder. Similarly, the majority (78% of females, 62% of males) struggle with substance abuse or dependence — acute needs that require specialized care.

We support OYA's goal of adding three psychologists and a supervising psychologist to its staff. *

- Current staffing to provide psychological services is not adequate to meet youth needs, current workload, or existing performance measures. *

**Because data shows a significant number of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) of trauma in the lives of young women involved with juvenile justice and data shows the abuse to prison pipeline for young women more psychologists are needed. Specifically, more psychologist time is critical for young women to develop trust relationships and time to give girls the opportunity to talk, so important to their developing relationships. Currently the psychologist is responding mostly to crisis, they need more time with young women to build their skills to overcome the impact of trauma on their brains and development. At Oak Creek there are young women that think about killing themselves every day. Closed custody for many young women only exacerbates their mental health symptoms. More time of expert care is greatly needed.*

➤ **Isolation Reduction**

As with the male facilities Oak Creek's success depends on an appropriate density of staff and youth, and adequate staffing and support for alternative approaches. Funding OYA at continuing service level will support its gains in reducing the use of isolation to date. Cuts risk undoing all its progress. *

**Through a developmental gender-responsive approach Oak Creek will: • create a context that is physically and emotionally safe for girls, with transparency, predictability and clear and consistent boundaries with staff. • Value the individual girl, with respect, authenticity, collaboration, compassion, mutuality, and relationship. • Restore personal power to girls, giving them choices, internal strength, skills building, and positive modeling. • Generate a culture and environment that addresses the whole girl, holistically considering the complex intersectional influences and realities of her life. And reduce the need for isolation.*

➤ **Additionally, We support (POP 103) Capital Construction - Medical and dental expansions*.**

**Girls need their own dental clinic, currently they are transported to MacLaren for dental care. Young women need an updated medical clinic at Oak Creek. The room is very small and not really an adequate setting for medical or annual exams. The space is so tight, it can't be considered trauma-informed.*

Thank you for consideration of the Coalition's recommendations.

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