

Testimony to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
Subcommittee on Public Safety  
By Ray Leary, President, The I Am Academy  
March 6, 2019

I would first like to acknowledge my appreciation for the leadership of Co-Chairs, The Honorable Senator Winters and the Honorable Representative Piluso, and express my thanks to all of the members of the Joint Committee On Ways and Means, Subcommittee On Public Safety, for giving us this opportunity.

I am here to support the continued funding of the Oregon Youth Authority at its 2017-19 levels. In doing so, it is vitally important to me that this distinguished body reinforces and strengthens the commitment to community-based residential and transitional programs for youth offenders in the State of Oregon. With your leadership and passion, we've come a long way. We had to break the mold to get this far. So we have an even longer way to go.

In a forward-looking report on youth justice, the Harvard Kennedy School's National Institute of Justice wrote, "It is difficult to find an area of U.S. policy where the benefits and costs are more out of balance, where the evidence of failure is clearer, or where we know with more clarity what we should be doing differently." ([https://sites.hks.harvard.edu/ocpa/cms/files/criminal-justice/research-publications/ntcc\\_the\\_future\\_of\\_youth\\_justice.pdf](https://sites.hks.harvard.edu/ocpa/cms/files/criminal-justice/research-publications/ntcc_the_future_of_youth_justice.pdf))

In our meetings and discussions, we have all been advanced by the evidence showing that youth fare best in the least restrictive environments possible. That means in communities, where there are high standards, tight guidelines, firm rules and swift discipline, all delivered in the spirit of love, education and positive views of the future. I implore you to make the budget reflect "what we should be doing differently."

All budgetary proposals promoting community-based residential care programs are an honest acknowledgement of the disproportionate representation of youth of color deep into the system – namely, in correctional facilities. The Oregon Youth Authority has negotiated visionary contractual agreements, opening the door to new opportunities for equity and fairness in the effort to redirect broken lives toward positive futures.

With your wise support, OYA has embraced the undeniable and unanimously accepted notion that the ultimate success of permanent transition begins inside our youth correctional facilities. That is stage one, where we instill a sense that doing well is a choice, productivity a personal achievement, and owning a positive attitude is the key to a better future. With your help and OYA's leadership, we are allowing institutions and communities to say, "You made a mistake, but YOU are not a mistake."

Give us the encouragement to pursue "what we should be doing differently." Stand up for those who deserve a second chance. Promote the people who are willing to work in our communities and in our institutions to show young people a new way of thinking about themselves, their mistakes and their futures. Put the money in community-based residential programs now, you'll save money in the future.

That is what we should be doing differently.

That is what I am asking you to do today.

Thank you very much.