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March 4, 2019

The Honorable Jackie Winters, Co-Chair
The Honorable Carla Piluso, Co-Chair
Members of the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety
900 Court Street
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee:

I'm writing to ask you to fund the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) at its current service level and to consider additional investments that would help it mitigate risks in key areas. Doing so will allow it to continue its nationally-recognized work to adopt the developmental approach, use data to improve youth outcomes, and to reduce the use of isolation while maintaining staff and youth safety. Funding OYA at current service level will help the agency continue these transformational efforts to promote safer communities for all Oregonians.

I also urge you to help OYA complete its three-biennium effort to align its budget with its services — which can be accomplished within OYA's current service level funding. Having a transparent and accurate budget is good stewardship and it allows Oregonians to better understand the needs and risks within OYA's budget. Please support the completion of this plan.

Additional investments can also help the agency address risks in key areas. As you know, Oregon's Juvenile Justice Information System (JJIS) — one of only three statewide juvenile justice databases in the nation — needs to be modernized to ensure it remains useful. Adding staff in strategic roles such as mental health, skill development, culturally-responsive services for underserved youth, foster care, and staff recruitment could do a lot to help the agency mitigate identified risks to its initiatives and to the youth it serves. Just as important would be positions bolstering key agency oversight functions in its Professional Standards Office and internal audit.

I head an organization called Morpheus Youth Project that currently contracts with MaLaren Youth Detention. I can attest to the important work being accomplished in the OYA due to the investments made by your committee. This investment is absolutely vital for the well being of the youth being served at OYA as well as the broader community.

I urge you to do all you can to support the wonderful work that OYA is doing with Oregon's youth and continue the momentum it has developed.

Respectfully,

Carlos Chavez (he, him)
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carlos Chavez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Morpheus Youth Project
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