

March 6, 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 write to you as a person committed to a justice system that keeps our communities safe by holding youth accountable while providing them with the skills they need to achieve reformation. I'm writing to urge you to support current service level funding for the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA), and to consider additional funding to assist the agency in mitigating risks that could interfere with its ability to achieve its mission if not addressed. I have served on the OYA Partnership Committee and am a life-long community member in Woodburn, OR.

As you know, the agency's mission is to provide the youth in its care with the skills they need to lead crime-free lives in our communities. It is recognized as a national leader in the juvenile justice field for:

- its pioneering work implementing the developmental approach, or Positive Human Development (PHD), an approach supported by the National Research Council, and creating living spaces aligned with it;
- the Youth Reformation System (YRS), which uses data to improve youth outcomes; and
- its successful work to reduce the use of isolation in its close custody facilities.

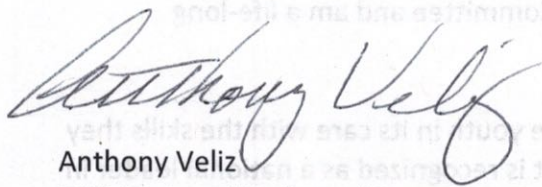
Maintaining funding levels for OYA will help the agency continue these transformational efforts to the benefit of the youth they serve and the safety of the public.

Additionally, I also urge you to support the completion of a joint effort by OYA, the Governor's office, and the legislature to align its budget with its services. For years, OYA has depended on unspent money in some areas to fully fund correctional services. While it has kept its spending within its overall budget, monies should be moved and permanent positions created to reflect its actual needs — all of which can be done within OYA's current service level funding. Having a transparent and accurate budget is good stewardship and it allows all of us to understand better the needs and risks within OYA's budget. Please support the completion of this plan.

Additional investments can help the agency address risks in key areas. The success of the developmental approach and to reduce isolation depend on having adequate staff to provide supportive relationships for youth, and on having enough specialized staff — mental health professionals for example — to provide the treatment and skill-building that OYA youth need to become crime-free, productive members of their communities. And the Youth Reformation System, which relies on the analysis of nearly 20 years of data on youth in the justice system, depends on modernizing the Juvenile Justice Information System (JJIS) — one of only three statewide juvenile justice databases in the nation — before its obsolete software causes it to fail. Additional strategic investments could go a long way to supporting youth of color, LGBTQQI youth, and other underserved youth; and bolstering key oversight functions in its Professional Standards Office and internal audit.

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,



Anthony Veliz
OYA Partnership Committee
Community Representative – Woodburn, OR