

March 7, 2019

The Joint Way and Means Sub-committee on Public Safety
The Honorable Jackie Winters, Co-chair
The Honorable Carla Piluso, Co-chair

Dear Co-chairs and Members of the Committee:

We are the SEIU executive committee for the 750 members of the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) with an appeal to fund OYA (HB 5541) at its current level and to consider additional investments to accomplish its mission, particularly as modified and enhanced within recent years.

In our facilities, we have significantly reduced isolation time through a number of means, all of which require enhanced staffing and training levels. We have made significant advances in adopting the developmental approach, away from a corrections model, by requiring a better staff-youth ratio, reducing the youth numbers per unit but maintaining a staffing level to address individual needs, rather than warehousing in a corrections dormitory. This requires more staff with specific skills as well as physical modification of facilities. Increased roles in strategic areas such as mental health, skill development, culturally-responsive needs, foster care, internal audit, and staff recruitment will help mitigate identified risks to our initiatives.

We are nationally recognized for our ability to capture, analyze, and use data to better increase the future capable and contributing members of our community. For example, OYA's recent hire of an impressive research director was ironically difficult because of the shallow pool of potential candidates, indicating how far advanced we are compared to other states. To maintain this momentum, we must update and modernize the Juvenile Justice Information System (JJIS) database – one of only three in the nation – an indicator of our early vision.

As you know, this initiative in OYA's transformational modernization has taken several biennia of legislative support and direction, and has resulted in the pioneering Positive Human Development (PHD), supported by the National Research Council (which also drives the modification of living spaces), and the Youth Reformation System (YRS), which together have contributed to the reduction of isolation in our close-custody facilities.

This modernization in systems, staffing, and structures requires an alignment with its budget and services. Monies should be moved and permanent positions created to reflect a transparent and accurate budget for our actual needs which can be done with our current service level funding. Good stewardship requires nothing less, and we urge you to continue your support.

Respectfully, SEIU Local 415 Officers:
Douglas K Dryden, President,
Janet Ferris, Vice President
Deborah Shook, Secretary-Treasurer
Debra Mitzel & Derrick Ingram, Chief Stewards