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Written Testimony to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety
The Honorable Jackie Winters, Co-Chair
The Honorable Carla Piluso, Co-Chair
Members of the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety

Dear Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee:

My name is Christina McMahan, I am the juvenile department director for Clackamas County, and I submitting this on behalf of Clackamas County and the Oregon Juvenile Department Directors' Association. This written testimony is in support of both the Juvenile Crime Prevention (JCP) Basic and Diversion Funding specifically, as well as the Oregon Youth Authority's (OYA) Budget.

Counties depend on JCP Basic and Diversion Funding

The JCP Basic and Diversion Funding to the Counties helps support critical services in county juvenile departments across the state so that we are able to provide a continuum of interventions and programs locally, and prevent youth from penetrating deeper into the system, reduce victimization, and keep our communities safer. Some of these JCP Basic and Diversion funded programs and services include:

- Detention
- Out-of-home placement
- Substance abuse treatment
- Sex offender treatment
- Cognitive behavioral interventions
- Mental health and trauma-informed treatment
- Community service and restitution payment programs
- Gender and culturally specific programming

Individual county juvenile departments do not operate in a vacuum – they are part of a much larger, deeply integrated continuum. Oregon's 36 county juvenile departments manage the majority of youth entering the justice system; OYA manages the deep end of the system. Consequently, funding decisions made for OYA also have downstream impacts for the counties. Changes to the front end of the system impact OYA; and changes to OYA's beds and services impact the counties' ability to provide appropriate services.

Funding OYA at Current Service Level is Critical to Counties

Decreases to OYA's current service level would threaten the ability of the entire juvenile justice system — including counties — to provide appropriate services, maintain community safety, and ensure youth become crime-free and productive members of society. Counties rely on OYA to manage youth whose behavior has escalated beyond what can be safely managed at the local level. Reductions could mean cuts to OYA staffing in facilities and in probation and parole offices, reducing the OYA's effectiveness and potentially impacting community safety. Cuts to OYA's facilities staff and living units would undermine OYA's ability to manage its system safely. The agency — and the entire juvenile justice system — need flexibility in where it houses youth of vastly different ages, backgrounds, and individual needs. OYA staff, including juvenile parole and probation officers (JPPOs), work to ensure that youth go to school, find employment, pay restitution, and have stable healthy living situations. They are close partners with the county juvenile departments as we work together to help youth stay crime-free and keep communities safe.

Counties also rely on OYA to provide treatment and other services beyond what many counties are able to provide, especially in rural counties and counties who do not have access to providers of specialized services. Youth have a wide variety of needs and serving them effectively requires a variety of programming options. Reducing OYA's current service level would undermine the counties' and OYA's efforts to provide youth with specialized services.

Continue Progress in Implementing the Developmental Approach and Providing Resources to Meet the Myriad of Diverse Needs of Youth

Additional investments in OYA are needed to better implement the developmental approach by reducing use of isolation, enhancing mental health services, providing culturally appropriate services, and keeping youth safe.

We support OYA's goal of hiring three Qualified Mental Health Professionals (QMHPs) at MacLaren. The number of youth in the juvenile justice system dealing with mental health issues has increased in recent years, even as the overall number of youth in the system has decreased. Counties are often unable to provide the mental health support locally that youth need, and refer them to OYA for services.

At OYA, the current mental health staff-to-youth ratio is no longer adequate to meet youth needs. Inadequate staffing means that QMHPs are only able to serve as crisis workers, and unable to address youths' underlying mental health issues. Hiring three additional QMHPs would improve OYA's ability to work with youth outside of crisis situations, and provide daily coverage for its specialized mental health units.

It is imperative that OYA's goal of taking steps to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion by hiring a workforce that mirrors the diversity of the youth it serves is actualized. Additional staff are needed in its Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Relations (OIIR), and funding is needed for specialized transitional programs for underserved youth.

OYA needs to hire a recruiter to help achieve its aim of hiring a more diverse workforce to match its youth population. The diversity of OYA staff in its facilities does not come close to matching that of the youth it serves. For example, particularly for African-American, Latino, and

Native American youth. With its current staffing, OYA can process and post recruitment notices to get positions filled; however, the agency is unable to provide robust outreach and community connections to underrepresented communities, implement a diversity recruitment strategy, develop tools to leverage other community resources for hard-to-fill jobs, or assist agency management with integrating diversity and inclusion strategies into workplace practices.

OYA's goal of adding staff to its Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Relations (OIIR) to serve youth of color and LGBTQQI youth needs to be actualized. The racial and ethnic disparities for youth entering the juvenile justice system nationally and in Oregon are well-documented. It's in the public interest to ensure that these do not worsen when youth leave the justice system. Fortunately, research suggests that youth are more successful when they receive treatment, education, and other services that respect and meet their specific cultural and linguistic needs. Unfortunately, OYA only has 11 OIIR staff who are expected to meet the needs of approximately 540 youth of color, and about 115 LGBTQQI youth. These youth are spread across OYA's nine close custody facilities and throughout community placements across Oregon.

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. However, OYA also needs additional specialized, community-based services to help address the cultural and linguistic needs of youth in community placements and youth attempting to transition from facilities to the community. To do this, OYA needs some funding in excess of its residential bed usage, in order to provide innovative transitional services for youth in the community — especially youth of color and LGBTQQI youth. These youth often are hard to place in treatment programs because the programs do not offer appropriate services or they have requirements that render the youth ineligible — e.g., entry guidelines that disallow youth with past weapon charges or gang affiliations.

JJIS is Vital to both County and OYA Operations and Must be Modernized

As Co-Chair of the JJIS Steering Committee, I can attest to how important JJIS is to the counties, and the tremendous support departments across the state have for modernizing the state's juvenile justice database — the Juvenile Justice Information System (JJIS) — before it becomes obsolete, and providing the proper IT staffing to support technology requests.

JJIS is not just an OYA database — all 36 county juvenile justice agencies co-manage JJIS in a formal partnership to provide continuity of care for the state's youth. We believe JJIS is the only instance of a unified database shared by state and county partners. Even within Oregon, it's highly unusual for a state database to be co-managed with external partners. Many have advisory boards with partners or community members, but JJIS is virtually unique in that it is governed by a steering committee in which counties actually have a 5-3 voting majority.

JJIS improves public safety by providing important, up-to-date information to 2,500 daily users across the state about the thousands of youth who encounter the justice system every year at both the county and state levels. This information bolsters the decision-making of judges, probation and parole officers, and service providers.

Aggregated data from JJIS is crucial for building the analytical Youth Reformation System tools that improve Oregon's ability to match youth with interventions and services that are more likely to reduce recidivism, keep communities safe, and produce better youth outcomes. Counties support using these tools to help inform local decision-making.

However, today's JJIS does not meet OYA's and its county partners' business needs for web and mobile platforms, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to support because of its now-obsolete software. If JJIS is not modernized, it will become difficult, if not impossible, to find developers to maintain the system, and eventually it will fail.

The Office of the State Chief Information Officer (OSCIO) ranked JJIS modernization as one of the top three highest-priority IT projects facing the state, and has recommended that OYA contract with an outside consulting firm to review available solutions. This will require additional funding from the legislature.

OYA also needs funding for two double-fill positions in its Information Services (IS) department. The county juvenile departments rely on OYA's IS staff to provide tech support for our staff who are using JJIS. The IS department's current staffing level cannot keep up with increasing demands for technical services, often causing significant delays in responding to help requests. OYA needs funding for these extra positions to help them better support their own agency as well as county partners.

Thank you for your consideration of my request to continue to support critical investments in juvenile justice that are made directly to the county juvenile departments, as well as those that are needed by OYA to continue the momentum to achieve better outcomes for the youth, less victimizations, and safer communities.

Sincerely,



Christina L. McMahan, Director

Clackamas County Juvenile Director and JJIS Steering Committee Co-Chair representing OJDDA