



BRIDGES
to change

Creating Hope Through Community

House Committee on Judiciary
Terry Myers, Mentor Program Director at Bridges to Change

March 14, 2019
Support for HB 3064, the Accountability and Equity Act

Chair Williamson, Vice-Chair Gorsek, Vice-Chair Sprenger, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Terry Myers and I am the Director of the Mentor Program at Bridges to Change. Our mission is to strengthen individual and families affected by addiction, mental health, poverty and homelessness.

I am here today to support HB 3064 and particularly the creation of the Equity Advisory Committee to the Criminal Justice Commission because I've seen first hand how impactful that work can be. At Bridges to Change, we are doing the critical work of having to examine our own issues around who we serve and the need to examine our approaches from an equity lens.

When Bridges to Change opened, we were a very small organization working with an almost all white population, and we looked at how many people were coming out of prison, how many of them were people of color and realized we were not serving all the people who needed our services. We had to ask ourselves if this was the organization we wanted to be and we knew we wanted to do better.

In 12-2017, we applied for and received a grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust to do an assessment of our work with an equity lens. We learned that not only were not serving people of color and other historically underserved communities, but we could not continue business as usual and do so effectively.

As a result of this work to better understand the disparities in our own programs we have learned, and continue to learn, how we can most effectively serve Latino, African-American, Asian and LGBTQ people who need our services.



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In the on-going development of our equity work, we are most proud to have recently opened the Diane Wade House, a transitional home that provide Afro-centric services to women in the criminal justice system. We learned in talking with equity leader in the community and creating a working groups analysis with African American leaders ie: Multnomah Co we found that we could not just open a house for black women, but we needed to be culturally specific and effective in our approach.

At Diane Wade we listened and have integrated the need to incorporate the idea of family and community into our treatment program to better serve African-American women. At Diane Wade we build a village of support, so that women can re-enter their communities strengthened with a sense of belonging and love we cultivate at Diane Wade with mentors who have similar lived experiences.

Given the great disparities with which African Americans are incarcerated in Oregon, we know this approach is greatly needed.

Still, we are just one program - one that receives funding through Justice Reinvestment. By starting a process for this analysis around the state for Justice Reinvestment the impact could be huge for communities that deserve our support.

"As we move work to end mass incarceration, we need to offer anti-racism training at every level of the criminal justice system as a vehicle for destabilizing deeply ingrained implicit and explicit racial biases. And we need to work toward an equitable system that honors human dignity and ensures public safety."