



Legislative Testimony

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

March 20, 2019

The Honorable Jennifer Williamson, Chair
House Committee on Judiciary

Re: House Bill 3146

Chair Williamson and members of the committee I am Colette Peters, Director of the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC). I am proud to be here today to testify in support of House Bill (HB) 3146.

What the Bill Does:

HB 3146 is simple and pioneering at the same time. This bill would change all statutory references from the word “inmate” to the words “adult in custody.”

Background Information:

We have nearly 15,000 individuals in our care and custody at 14 institutions and almost all of them are going to return to our community and become our neighbors. The Oregon Constitution mandates that “the law for the punishment of crime shall be founded on these principles: protection of society, personal responsibility, accountability for one’s actions, and reformation.”

While individuals who are sentenced to DOC come to us as punishment, they do not come to us for punishment. In fact we now know that in order to protect society, help our Adults in Custody (AICs) take personal responsibility, be accountable for their actions, and engage in reformation we must treat them in a normalized environment and in the most humane way possible.

Words are powerful and they matter. It is neither normal nor human to label people, and by calling people “inmates” it is labeling. Labeling them in this way has allowed us to stigmatize and marginalize an entire group of people, tens of thousands in Oregon and more than 20 million people across this country who have a felony record.* It sets up a dynamic in prison that follows them into the community and impacts their Re-entry into society.

Ninety-five percent of the people we incarcerate will return to our communities and a large portion of their success lies with landlords, hiring managers, neighbors, health care professionals, and the community at large, welcoming them back after they have served their sentence.

As a former victim's advocate, I want to put on the record that this is in no way, shape, or form, minimizing the crime they committed and the victim they created when they were sent to us. Rather, it is a subtle but historic change that will prevent future victims. This will mean better public safety.

This is an historic time for public safety reform at the national, state, and local levels. As we continue efforts to normalize and humanize, Oregon has positioned its self as a national leader and this is the next logical step. I would like to thank Madam Chair Williamson for bringing this historic change forward.

Requested Action:

For the reasons explained above, the department asks this committee to vote HB 3146 out of committee with a do-pass recommendation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Submitted by:

Oregon Department of Corrections

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