

My name is Lawrence E. Johnson. I have lived in Oregon twice. Once as a child, 1950 to 1954 in Portland and again since 1980. I became an Oregon lawyer in 1985. I have worked as a deputy district attorney, 1988 to 1990 and in private practice. I practiced as a criminal defense attorney after leaving the DA's office. I also practiced family law. Mental health has been and remains a common thread in all of the clients or individuals I have been exposed in my legal experience. I include all individuals, clients, witnesses, judges, attorneys everyone, all ages, all genders. I have tried to observe and learn. Many of the CLEs I have attended were directed at mental health. For me, mental health is at the core of every aspect of my experience in law. I am a father of two. So I feel free to offer my opinion on youth in the criminal system. I write to you today regarding Senate Bills: 966, 968, 969 and 1008. Each of these bills have a common thread, science. The science of observation backed by research and facts. One aspect of age, I am 70, is that I can see the history of how laws evolved. Too often, laws are written based on an anecdotal rational, based on a tragic event but without considering the consequences. Each of the above bills address the issues of the consequences. Our treatment of youth is in need of revamping based on facts. It does not take a leap of faith to know that individuals make mistakes. And, young persons make more mistakes. Some of the mistakes are the result of their environment, peer pressure, addiction, or (mental) health issues. But, almost by definition, youthful mistakes are not and cannot be used to justify a lifelong sentence. Youth learn from mistakes and go forward to have more meaningful lives. To brand a youth a sex offender for the rest of their adult life is not only cruel and unusual punishment but wrong. Youthful behavior, no matter how serious, including murder, rape, does not forever stain that youth's ability to grow, adapt to acceptable behavior, contribute to society, grow personally. Everyone deserves a chance to reclaim themselves from their mistakes, especially the youth. Each of the above Senate Bills addresses issues that need to be addressed and I urge you to vote in favor of each of them.

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