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Rev. Dr. William Sinkford, Senior Minister
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**Testimony in Support for Youth Justice Reform, SB 1008, SB 969, SB 968, SB 966
Submitted by Reverend Bill Sinkford, Senior Minister
March 26, 2019**

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and members of Senate Judiciary Committee:

My name is Reverend Bill Sinkford and I am the Senior Minister at First Unitarian Church of Portland. **I am writing today to express our support for Youth Justice Reform, SB 1008, SB 969, SB 966 and SB 968.** As Unitarian Universalists, we believe that we are part of the interconnected web of life and that all people have inherent worth and dignity. Our vision calls and challenges us to build the beloved community where no one is left behind. Our faith guides us to examine how we treat our convicted siblings and to work for a youth justice process that both builds accountability for youth offenders and ensures the safety of our communities while maintaining the inherent dignity and worth of each young person. Our criminal justice system should be geared toward rehabilitation and redemption as well as public safety. Each of the bills we support with this letter are important steps toward this goal.

Since the passage of Measure 11 we have seen the inhumane effects of the harsh “tough on crime” penalties that charge youth as young as 15 to be charged and sentenced as adults for certain acts, facing the same mandatory minimum penalties as adults. Brain science and longitudinal studies show that harsh penalties for youth do not set them up for rehabilitation nor do they prevent further crime. Youth should have the opportunity to repair the damage they have caused, get resources for healing their own trauma, and receive supports that will foster positive change.

We ask you to swiftly act on these four proposals in front of the Oregon that focus on prevention and rehabilitation for youth in the criminal justice system:

- **SB 969 (End Automatic Waiver into Adult Court)** places youth accused of any crimes in the juvenile justice system instead of the adult justice system. To move a youth to the adult justice system, prosecutors would need to request a special hearing with a judge who would decide where youth are placed.
- **SB 966 (Hearing Before Transfer to DOC)** would require an additional review before a youth with a long sentence would be transferred to an adult prison. Currently, Oregon youth who are given long sentences can stay in a youth prison until age twenty-five and are then transferred to an adult prison. This proposal would allow a judge to determine if the twenty-five-year old has been sufficiently rehabilitated to transfer them to community-based supervision, rather than adult prison.
- **SB 1008 (Second Look Hearings)** establishes a process where all youth who are convicted in adult court have access to a "Second Look" hearing half way through their sentence. At that hearing, a judge determines whether the youth has taken responsibility

for their crime and been rehabilitated, which would allow the remainder of their sentence to be served under community-based supervision, rather than being incarcerated.

- **SB 968 (End Juvenile Life Without Parole)** would eliminate life without parole sentences for youth in Oregon by establishing a process to ensure that anyone convicted of a crime when they are under eighteen years old receives a chance for parole after fifteen years of incarceration.

Please move these proposals forward this session so that our incarcerated youth can take responsibility and atone for their harmful actions while being given support for a second chance. We believe that a successful second chance comes through rehabilitation, education and supported re-entry to society. These are fundamental principles of the beloved community that respects the inherent worth and dignity of every person. We ask you to do your part for Oregon's youth.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Reverend Bill Sinkford