



February 5, 2020

Testimony in Support of House Bill 4131
Family Preservation Project
Submitted by Courtney Helstein on behalf of Family Forward Oregon

Chair Sanchez and Members of the Committee -

Family Forward Oregon supports House Bill 4131, which will provide sufficient and stable funding to the Family Preservation Project.

Women are entering the criminal justice system in increasing numbers due to the effects of poverty, trauma, unsafe housing, abuse, low levels of economic capital, discrimination and institutional racism.

According to an article by the Statesman Journal, the number of women imprisoned in Oregon has nearly tripled over the past 20 years, even though women are not committing more frequent or more serious crimes. Dr. Emily Salisbury, an associate professor at the University of Nevada Las Vegas, who studies this issue nationally, has noted, "It's not that women are becoming more violent, but instead that our sentencing laws have changed. The war on drugs has been a war on women, particularly women of color."

A recent survey of women incarcerated at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCF) done by the by the Oregon Justice Resource Center (in partnership with Portland State University), shows widespread reports of past domestic violence and childhood trauma. Sixty-nine percent of women surveyed there said past trauma led to their involvement in the criminal justice system.

Over 68,000 children in Oregon have had an incarcerated parent in their lifetime and 80% of women who are incarcerated are mothers.

Family Forward believes that if we want to break the cycle of poverty and incarceration in Oregon, we must look for ways to better support women and families far before any involvement with the criminal justice system. But we also desperately need to change what happens to women within the criminal justice system.



The Family Preservation Project has impacted the lives of thousands of Oregon mothers and children, providing services to help incarcerated women and their children overcome cycles of poverty, trauma, and intergenerational involvement in the criminal justice system. Sufficient, stable funding will ensure these families get the support they need.

A proven model for strengthening families and communities, the Family Preservation Project helps mothers take ownership of their lives and changes the lives of children with an incarcerated parent, reducing trauma and providing support they do not receive anywhere else. Funding this program is a matter of urgency for incarcerated mothers in Oregon and their children. We urge your support for HB 4131.