

February 5, 2020

Rep. Tawna Sanchez, Chair
House Committee on Judiciary
Oregon Legislature

Chair Sanchez and Members of the Committee,

My name is Vanessa Sherrod. My children and I had the opportunity to be a part of the Family Preservation Project and all its wonderful services.

I was just recently released from prison and through my transition, I can see full circle the benefits this program provided for my children, family, marriage and for myself. The way that I am tackling barriers, that I am facing and finding healthy balances in everyday life situations and interactions is all rooted from the investment this program made in me and my children's life. I see my kids taking accountability, speaking their needs and using their feelings to communicate and its all skills we practiced over the years through the program. I have experienced the support from the community that was built over time through their schools, programming and mentors. The whole focus of the program is to invest in our children and supporting them to become the best human beings possible, literally we built a village to overcome obstacles and rise for every occasion for my kids.

This work continues after prison and I am excited to see where we will get over the next few years and beyond. There is continued HOPE and a big light at the end of the tunnel. It would be an injustice to not support the Family Preservation Project and the work it does for the families and the communities they live in.

We know that 80% of the women incarcerated are mothers, that would mean this program roughly serves 20% of that population on going. That is the highest population being served compared to any other program inside the prison and that is not including the ripple effect of the amount of children, family members, government services, financial stress and communities that are all seeing the effect of the 20% being served.

Please vote yes on HB 4131 and be a part of the village that makes a difference everyday in so many people's lives.

Sincerely,
Vanessa Sherrod

Here is a list of just some of the work we did when I was incarcerated:

- Opportunities to schedule and communicate via email or phone with teachers and counselors from their school. Check their grades and find ways to support their

education by sending books home and find ways to create incentives for their education goals and find support if needed with certain subjects.

- Finding mentors and support for household struggles.
- Having an open line of communication going both ways (mail, email, and phone) for everyone to feel supported and at ease. Sending unlimited mail with encouragement and thoughts of love and missing you moments. Taking time to build and rebuild important relationships and set boundaries.
- Opportunity to contact any legal departments or unresolved issues in the community to better help with the transition during and after release.
- Support to caregivers in areas that may be foreign to parenting our children
- Help with finding resources in the community to meet the household's needs. Ex: Food, clothes, electric bills, food stamps, insurance, garbage, furniture...
- Providing backpacks with school supplies
- Finding support for my kids in extracurricular activities from the community. Keeping them motivated and involved in their community is important.
- Spending holidays and celebrating them as they should be together and with fun activities. Christmas dinner with presents, Easter meal with Easter baskets and hunting for eggs, Thanksgiving with meal and sharing what were thankful for, Halloween dressing up and being silly and trick or treating....
- Activities and creativity using resources wisely. Making sand bottles with a message in the bottle for the day we release, making slime, getting to know you games, making and sending picture frames home, making bracelets, writing gratitude cards, arts and crafts...