



**PARTNERSHIP FOR
SAFETY & JUSTICE**

**Testimony Regarding Budget Rebalance Proposal
Joint Committee On The Second Special Session of 2020
August 10, 2020**

Co-Chairs Courtney and Kotek and Members of the Committee:

Partnership for Safety and Justice (PSJ) submits this testimony in regard to the closure of Shutter Creek Correctional Institute in the Co-Chairs' budget rebalance proposal.

PSJ is a statewide, nonprofit organization that advocates for public safety and criminal justice policies. For over 20 years, our work has advanced state and local solutions that ensure accountability, equity, and healing for people convicted of crime, crime survivors, and the families and communities of both.

As we testified last month before the Ways and Means Public Safety Subcommittee, our country and our state are in a moment when the systemic and structural racism inherent in our criminal justice system is being widely recognized and called to account. This crisis of racial disparities is only one of the crises that our state faces today. We are also responding to an extremely contagious and deadly pandemic and the resulting large state budget deficits.

All three emergencies can be addressed in part by today's proposal to close Shutter Creek Correctional Institution, and we can do it with the same approach that Oregon has been using with enormous success since 2013:

We must continue to divest from corrections to invest in communities.

Now more than ever, Oregon has to invest in what works for safety, healing, and equity. Long prison sentences don't work; what works is investing in historically underserved communities, including rural communities and communities of color.

Oregon's public safety system today is not rooted in safety, healing, or equity. One out of every 21 Black Oregonians is held in prison,¹ which **places Oregon 7th in the nation for our rate of incarceration of African Americans.**² Disproportionately policing, charging, and incarcerating Black Oregonians is not public safety.

We applaud the Legislature for considering the bold steps that are necessary to rebalance our budget with an approach to public safety that prioritizes equity and community healing. To save vital taxpayer dollars, we urge this Committee to:

¹ 2016 data:

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons/>

² https://www.oregonlive.com/politics/2016/06/oregon_imprisons_african_ameri.html

1. Move forward with a thoughtful plan for how to close Shutter Creek while being mindful of the needs of the Coos Bay community. We know that adults in custody in rural prisons have less access to the visitation opportunities and organizational programs, especially culturally specific programs, that foster rehabilitation and reduce future crime. We also know rural communities need investments not tied to perpetuating mass incarceration, including paying jobs that may be displaced by prison labor.
2. Support the Governor and Oregon Department of Corrections to follow other states and immediately and safely decompress the prison population with early transitions to prevent the further spread of coronavirus. Commuting sentences of individuals without a significant safety risk to the community reduces the danger of coronavirus transmission and frees up state dollars to be reinvested in BIPOC and rural communities.
3. Pass meaningful sentencing reforms in the 2021 legislative session that will further reduce Oregon's excessive prison population.
4. Invest in communities with services that prevent crime, support crime survivors, and keep families strong.

The State's budget is a reflection of our state's priorities. All four of these budget recommendations are vital to addressing Oregon's massive fiscal deficit, our health crisis, and our overreliance on an ineffective criminal justice system that disproportionately discriminates against Oregonians who are Black, Indigenous, and other people of color.

We urge your support.

Respectfully,

Andy Ko, Executive Director at Partnership for Safety and Justice