



March 2, 2021

House Committee on Judiciary
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Testimony in Support of HB 3096

Chair Bynum, Vice Chair Noble, Vice Chair Power, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 3096 behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon (ACLU of Oregon), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing civil liberties and civil rights, with more than 28,415 members statewide.

Mass incarceration is a crisis in Oregon and across this country. The ACLU of Oregon continues to advocate for a fundamental shift in our understanding of public safety: From a system that relies on mass incarceration to one that is more just and reinvests in health and wellbeing of all of our communities. The burden of our mass incarceration system is not felt equally across our society, it is disproportionately felt by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. In addition to the racial disparity in the system, an alarming gender disparity exists in our criminal justice system.

While women represent a smaller segment of the overall prison population, nationally, women account for the fastest growing segment of the prison population. We must not underestimate the outsized impact our mass incarceration system has on women. The ACLU of Oregon joined legislators, community-based organizations, former justice-involved women, and others in the Gender Responsiveness Workgroup held in 2020.

In the meetings, we heard first-hand accounts of women and their experience in Oregon prisons, and the stories were both emotional and horrifying. A large proportion of justice-involved women experienced sexual abuse or other forms of victimization; engaged in substance abuse to cope with past and current trauma; engaged in criminal behavior while under the influence or to support drug use; are more likely to experience poverty or employment instability; and so much more. In prison, past traumas can be repeatedly triggered through the prison power dynamic, from exposure to physical and emotional violence, and from a lack of proper or responsive mental health treatment.

The Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC) can and must do better for justice involved women here in Oregon. That is why the ACLU of Oregon supports HB 3096 with the -1 Amendment, which will provide for a third-party assessment of intake; placement; risk assessment; case management; mental, behavioral, and physical health services; vocational programs; rehabilitation programs; correctional staff; organizational structure; reentry and transition programming; and other policies from a gender-responsive, culturally-responsive, and trauma-informed lens. Additionally, the -1 Amendment tasks the Governor with designating an independent gender-responsiveness coordinator to assist with the assessment process, lead a Gender-Responsiveness Advisory Council, and report back to the legislature on the assessment, community input, and policy recommendations.

The findings of this assessment will be an important baseline for strategic planning processes and policy recommendations to improve protections of individuals serving sentences of incarceration at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility. **For these reasons, the ACLU of Oregon urges you to support HB 3096 with the -1 Amendment.**

Thank you,

Jennifer Williamson
On Behalf of
The ACLU of Oregon