
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon

March 2, 2021

Chair Bynum, Vice-Chairs Noble and Power, and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary,

Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon urges strong support for HB 3096. We stand with our reproductive justice partners who have long proclaimed that the fight for justice and equity does not end with having the right to make reproductive and sexual health decisions. That fight must include advocating for people to have the power and resources necessary to support themselves and raise their families in safe environments and healthy communities, with equitable access to justice, education, and opportunity.

The number of women imprisoned in the Oregon Department of Corrections has nearly tripled over the past 20 years despite the fact that women are not committing more frequent or serious crimes.¹ One driver of these increased rates of incarceration is changes in sentencing laws, related to certain drug and property crimes, which have disproportionately impacted women of color.² Women follow unique pathways into crime and present risk factors that indicate different intervention needs than men. A larger proportion of justice-involved women have experienced sexual abuse and/or other forms of victimization, family violence, unhealthy relationships, unsafe housing, and are of low socioeconomic status.³

Justice-involved women are also more likely than their male counterparts to be the sole support and caregivers for their children, who also face a greater risk of justice involvement as a result of having an incarcerated parent. Here in Oregon about 75% of women in prisons are mothers. Yet, our current corrections systems often deny basic rights⁴ such as access to quality reproductive and maternal health care, as well as regular family contact and support. This can have long term impacts on a family member's ability to make a successful re-entry, or their ability to earn a living to care for themselves and their children. Black, Indigenous, and other people of color are often the most impacted, as these communities often face disproportionately long sentences.

Unfortunately, because justice involved women are a smaller population, their needs are chronically unmet. A lack of gender responsive practices directly impacts mass incarceration and perpetuates cycles of trauma, victimization and harm among impacted families and communities. Broadly defined, gender responsive approaches are those that intentionally allow research and knowledge on women to affect and guide policy and practice at all levels of service delivery. This research encompasses: women's socialization and psychological development; the social, political and economic realities of women's lives; women's unique risk, strength and need factors (pathways research); and cutting-edge evidence on what works with women. Gender responsive approaches can and should be applied at the macro level in terms of how corrections systems are designed and function, and at the facility and community levels in terms of how facilities and community corrections agencies operate and deliver services.

House Bill 3096 would direct the Oregon Department of Corrections to study issues specific to women in custody and report back to the Legislative Assembly by December 31, 2021. The purpose of the assessment is to establish a baseline for a strategic planning process, policy recommendation and improved protection of individuals serving sentences of incarceration at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility. Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon urges the committee's support of HB 3096.

Sincerely,

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Interim Executive Director
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon

¹ <https://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/crime/2017/02/16/oregon-faces-skyrocketing-female-prison-population/98012786/>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/>