
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon

March 2, 2021

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110 Implementation,

Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon urges strong support for SB 720. 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 What's more, justice-involved women have often 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. About 75% of women in Oregon prisons are mothers. Furthermore, 20,000 children in Oregon currently have at least one parent that has been incarcerated. Children with an incarcerated mother are more likely to be placed in foster care and are more likely to be incarcerated in their lifetime. Connecting those children with their mothers and engaging families in therapeutic support reduces their trauma and reduces those likelihoods.

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.

Time away from work and social networks causes multi-generational harm and has a disproportionate impact on the health and economic status of the incarcerated person, as well as their families. If measures are not taken to address the unique needs of this population, many of which are impacted greatly by gender, race and the other underlying factors, it is clear the mass incarceration of women will continue to impact our larger communities.

SB 720 would codify and fund a vital program, the Family Preservation Project, which is a proven model for strengthening families and communities by providing support not otherwise available, including arranging therapeutic visitations for families; intensive transition planning; caregiver support; biopsychosocial assessments and interventions; weekly classes and support groups; and other resources. Investing \$650,000 per biennium into the Family Preservation Project will help incarcerated women and their children overcome cycles of poverty, trauma, and intergenerational involvement in the criminal justice system. Furthermore, these investments will help mitigate the costs that would otherwise be incurred by state agencies, such as DHS, OHA, and ODE. We respectfully urge your support for SB 720.

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/>