



March 18, 2020

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

On behalf of NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon, we would like to share our strong support for HB 2169, to improve public safety in Oregon and reform our criminal justice system by adopting the recommendations of the Racial Justice Council. As members of the Fair Shot For All Coalition we support this bill as part of our ongoing work towards achieving racial justice in Oregon.

NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon works to ensure everyone in Oregon can make personal decisions regarding the full range of reproductive choices, including preventing unintended pregnancy, raising healthy families, and choosing legal abortion. Everyone—regardless of their circumstances—deserves the tools, healthcare services and education they need to be empowered in making these personal decisions to decide if, when and how they would like to raise a family.

Communities of color in Oregon have lived through generations of white supremacist violence and systemic racism. Many people of color—especially Black Oregonians—do not feel safe in their own communities, homes, places of worship, at school, or in public spaces. The deep trauma of living in a culture of white supremacy and systemic racism has created widespread harm that impacts all of us.

We believe in reproductive justice, and want to work towards a future in which everyone is able to feel safe in their own skin, and has the ability to raise a family in a healthy and safe environment. Unfortunately, Oregon's criminal justice system continues to disproportionately detain, criminalize, and harm communities of color. Oregonians need public safety programs that actually keep people safe, that are transparent and accountable and will help ensure people are not caused additional harm and trauma by a criminal justice system that lacks a racial justice lens.

House Bill 2169 includes recommendations from the Criminal Justice Reform & Police Accountability Committee of the Governor's Racial Justice Council. The Council's objective is to center Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and immigrant voices in the development of public safety policy solutions. The proposed reforms would accomplish the following:

- **Promote restorative justice:** Encourage greater use of restorative justice practices with funding provided to the Criminal Justice Commission
- **Prevent unnecessary deportations:** Make diversion possible for immigrants accused of crime, so they can perform community service, pay restitution and/or receive treatment in their community, rather than automatic deportation and traumatic family separation.
- **Expand police oversight:** Authorize the creation of a police oversight agency or board by city and county governments
- **Improve transparency:** Improve public access to personnel files for police officers who have been investigated for misconduct

- **Require police identification:** Law enforcement officers would be required to inform a reason for why they stopped to speak to a person, and that person have the right to refuse a request to search
- **Ensure informed police searches:** Require law enforcement officers to provide name and badge number if the stop doesn't result in an arrest or citation.

NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon recognizes the widespread racial disparities exist throughout Oregon's criminal justice system. We know that each time we lock someone up, we also sentence their family members to traumatic separation and financial hardship. Currently, 80% of the women currently incarcerated at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility are mothers.¹

Racial inequality is a public health crisis. Public safety institutions have caused entire communities generational trauma for far too long. The disruptions caused by COVID-19 and community-led calls for racial justice have magnified the urgency for action.

Khalil Gibran Muhammad, professor of history, race, and public policy at the Harvard Kennedy School wrote,

*"History shows that crime data was never objective in any meaningful sense...Instead, crime statistics were 'weaponized' to justify racial profiling, police brutality, and ever more policing of Black people."*²

Citing Muhammad's research, Harvard historian Jill Lepore has summarized the consequences this way:

*"Police patrolled Black neighborhoods and arrested Black people disproportionately; prosecutors indicted Black people disproportionately; juries found Black people guilty disproportionately; judges gave Black people disproportionately long sentences; and, then, after all this, social scientists, observing the number of Black people in jail, decided that, as a matter of biology, Black people were disproportionately inclined to criminality."*³

The policies developed by the Criminal Justice Reform and Police Accountability Committee will make all of us safer by centering those who are most disproportionately harmed by our criminal justice system. Together, we can make Oregon a place where we all have a fair shot and feel safe. **We urge your YES vote on HB 2169.**

Sincerely,

Jeanine Morales
Deputy Director
NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon

¹<https://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/2019/08/05/oregon-legislature-cuts-fund-prison-family-pre-servation-project-oregon/1838496001/>

² <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/02/solving-racial-disparities-in-policing/>

³ Ibid.