

# YES on HB 2912



Improve the health and safety of Oregon communities by reauthorizing Re\*Membering which provides reentry-focused civil legal services to women during incarceration.

**Re\*Membering provides civil legal assistance to people incarcerated in Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCF) to address legal issues that might become or already are barriers to their successful reentry into the community.** It is a pilot program of the Oregon Justice Resource Center (OJRC) established in 2019 through funding authorized by the legislature.

## The issue

**Almost everyone incarcerated in Oregon will return to our communities one day.** Many will cycle through our criminal justice system more than once, caught in a cycle of poverty, marginalization, crime, and incarceration. Our communities pay a high price. New skills and a genuine commitment to change may not be enough for post-prison success due to overwhelming legal, social, and economic barriers.

**Many challenges faced by formerly incarcerated people are a result of civil legal issues unaddressed during or exacerbated by incarceration,** as well as more than a thousand Oregon laws and policies that are barriers to full participation in society by those with criminal histories.

**Access to civil legal services is difficult to obtain.** Once released, most people cannot afford an attorney. Pro bono attorneys and legal aid cannot meet the demand. Due to the specialized nature of legal work and the breadth of legal issues one person may face, a single attorney in the community generally cannot provide the person enough assistance.

## Legal issues facing incarcerated Oregonians



Child custody and parental rights



Debt



Housing and employment



Suspended/revoked driver licenses



Real property



Personal property



Other basic human needs

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“[You] gave me a place to come home to – literally. [You] saved my home. It’s a huge benefit to not have to go to transitional housing.”

Client feedback

**Investing in civil legal services for currently incarcerated people will help reduce the risk of recidivism and increase the chances of stability.** Tackling problems before they spiral out of control saves resources later. Helping people get ready for their return to society just makes sense.

OJRC attorneys have been working with people at CCCF since 2014. Their skills in problem-solving, collaboration, synthesizing information, and communication are a good fit for a range of needs. The OJRC is well-equipped to learn from client experiences, provide quality public and stakeholder education, and help identify reforms to improve reentry.

### What does HB 2912 do?

- Reauthorizes funds for Re\*Membering, established in 2019 by the legislature, a two-year pilot program serving people incarcerated at CCCF, Oregon’s only women’s prison.
- Provides access to civil legal assistance via three OJRC attorneys who have the experience to understand the unique needs of justice-involved women at a cost of \$800,000 for the biennium.
- Prepares people for a more successful reentry by helping them navigate and resolve civil legal needs before they leave prison.
- Offers a statewide service, helping people returning to counties throughout Oregon.
- Puts to good use the relatively stable environment people experience in prison to address their problems.

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“Without this program I would have been lost, and I probably wouldn’t have seen my children because of my lack of knowledge.”

Client feedback

### Re\*Membering has done amazing work since it began meeting with clients in late November 2019



Despite the challenges of the pandemic, we have served nearly 60 women, more than 55% identifying as BIPOC, each with 1-6 different legal matters.



We have served women releasing to 20 different counties, with 75% releasing to counties outside the metropolitan tri-county (Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas) area.



In the first three months, we received over 200 requests for services.



We have a volunteer attorney advisory committee with more than a dozen members, covering a range of issue areas.

## Examples of assistance

- Helped a client avoid foreclosure of her home.
- Helped a client who lost parental rights establish a written agreement allowing continued communication between herself, her young child, and the adoptive parents.
- Helped a client address property code violation notices to protect her home from further legal action.
- Helped a client address concerns about her identity and credit after receiving notice from a state agency that her personal information was exposed to a data breach.
- Helped a client enforce her right to phone and video contact with her children who reside out-of-state, so they can maintain their relationship until she is able to reunite with them.
- Helped clients remit tens of thousands of dollars in fines and other debt.
- Helped client develop a safety plan against possible harassment by an abusive former partner after her release.
- Helped clients safeguard inherited property and other personal property.
- Helped a client successfully advocate for a reduced prison sanction in another state, based on her progress while incarcerated in CCCF and her support in the community. This advocacy resulted in community supervision instead of further out-of-state incarceration after release from CCCF.
- Advocated for the amendment of a client's criminal judgment which resulted in her release from CCCF about one year earlier than originally sentenced, allowing her to be with her husband of 30+ years, who is terminally ill. This client also has underlying medical conditions that make her particularly vulnerable to serious complications or death if she contracts COVID-19. She was released in early April 2020.

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*“As women, inmates, humans, we constantly feel degraded, dehumanized and unworthy. There were many times when I felt almost speechless because you helped me more than I asked for and I didn't feel like I deserved such generosity and kindness.”*

Client feedback

## The bottom line

By making a modest investment now in civil legal assistance during incarceration, Oregon can save taxpayer dollars and improve the health and safety of our families and communities.

## Organizations in support



Questions? Contact Zach Winston, Policy Director, [zwinston@ojrc.info](mailto:zwinston@ojrc.info), or Julia Yoshimoto, Women's Justice Project Director, [jyoshimoto@ojrc.info](mailto:jyoshimoto@ojrc.info). Ph: 503-944-2270.