

May 13th, 2021

House Committee on Judiciary

Re: Support for SJR 10

Chair Bynum, Vice Chairs Noble and Power, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing today to ask for your support of SJR 10. This proposed amendment would remove the antiquated language of slavery from the Oregon Constitution. Currently, Article 1, Section 34 of our State Constitution reads, "There shall be neither slavery, nor involuntary servitude in the State, otherwise than as a punishment for crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted."

This exception clause allows for the constitutional classification of incarcerated individuals as slaves, denying our incarcerated communities dignity and humanity, while perpetuating historic racism. It should go without saying that slavery and involuntary servitude are immoral, unjust, and unacceptable in any circumstance. Oregon has a chance to set a precedent for the nation by finally undoing this portion of our ongoing national legacy of dehumanization and racial violence. In addition, this step would help to reduce the economic incentive for mass incarceration, as the free, forced labor of incarcerated individuals could no longer be used either to prop up the operation and maintenance of prisons themselves, or for the cheaper production of corporate goods. If a system requires slavery or involuntary servitude to function, then that system is morally bankrupt.

SJR 10, as introduced, would remove this exception clause from the Oregon Constitution and finally do away with constitutionally permitted slavery in our state. This change in language is an essential step towards amplifying the message that Oregon is committed to being actively anti-racist.

We believe it is imperative that Oregon take this proactive step to demand a more just and equitable future, wherein everyone has the rights, resources, and recognition needed to thrive. I urge this Committee to vote yes on SJR 10, as introduced, to ensure that slavery is truly a thing of the past.

In solidarity,

Jojo