

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

I am writing today in support of SJR 10, an amendment which 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 means that our constitution continues to legally allow slavery for people convicted of a crime. I believe that most Oregonians would be, as I was, horrified to learn that our state constitution continues to include this clause in spite of the many decades of struggle by Oregonians to push to address the historic and ongoing racism in our state.

The language we use is important. While there are plenty of other substantive reforms we must make to reduce the harm our criminal legal system enacts in people's lives, this change is important. I do not want to live in a state that constitutionally denies my incarcerated neighbors their dignity and humanity by classifying people as slaves; no child should grow up knowing that their incarcerated parent is legally classified as a slave.

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 must take this step as part of our broader commitment to ensuring a state where everyone has what they need to live a safe, fulfilling life free from oppression. I urge this Committee to vote yes on SJR 10, as introduced, to ensure that slavery is truly a thing of the past.