

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. None of us should be ok with rhetoric or action that promotes the enslavement of other human beings in our community under any circumstances.

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.

As a school social worker and mental health professional, I work with youth everyday who astound with their resiliency, creativity, and ability to survive the dehumanization of their communities when family members, friends and neighbors are incarcerated. The time is NOW to make legal and policy changes that align with the core values of deeply valuing every human's inherent dignity and worth.

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,  
Siri Michel-Midelfort