

I write today in support of SJM2 and SJR10 which propose to initiate the amendment process for both the state and national constitutions. In my 73 years as a citizen of this country, and 50 plus years as an Oregonian, it is my privilege to participate in the eradication of this blatant human rights violation.

In his 1963 letter from a Birmingham jail, Martin Luther King, Jr. writes "A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law....Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust." These proposed bills seek to make our laws more just.

These amendments seek to remove the loophole that allows forced labor from people duly convicted of a crime. That is a wide net. A nonviolent petty thief is included in the same net as a mass murderer! We must also consider who makes the laws? For decades, people most impacted by these "laws" have been disenfranchised from the process that determines the laws. As we strive to make a more perfect union, these unfair practices must be replaced with fairer ones.

To the extent that the criminal "justice" system is to prepare people for reintegration to society, payment for voluntary work is uplifting. Forced labor whether paid or not is degrading. If you need a visual image of the degradation of forced labor rewatch Paul Newman in Cool Hand Luke.

I am pleased that these bills have been introduced into this session of the Oregon Legislature and am grateful to be able to offer my support.