



February 24, 2021

To: The Senate Committee on Judiciary and Measure 110 Implementation
From: Michele Ruffin, Oregon Political Director, Forward Together Action
Re: Support of SB 571

Dear Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher and Members of the Committee,

My name is Michele Ruffin and I am the political director of Forward Together Action, a multi-issue organization working with Black, Indigenous, Women of Color and Non-Binary people to push for the systems change we need for all families to thrive. I'm testifying today on behalf of our organization's full support of SB 571--- a statutory change to restore voting rights to Oregonians in prison.

As an organization that works with families who are disproportionately impacted every day by systems such as health care provisions, educational institutions and incarceration we believe that the only way to move toward a better world is to create solutions centered in the lives and experiences of these impacted families.

A joint survey and subsequent report Forward Together conducted in 2015 found some stark realities for families with incarcerated loved ones around meeting basic needs, paying court costs and fulfilling parenting and care responsibilities. Below are some of the findings:¹

- 2 in 3 families had difficulty meeting basic needs as a result of their loved one's conviction and incarceration.
- Nearly 1 in 5 families were unable to afford housing due to the loss of income resulting from a loved one's incarceration.

¹ <https://forwardtogether.org/tools/who-pays/>



- 1 in 5 families across income levels reported taking out a loan to cover court costs due to the onerous amount that was due from things like court fees and fines, bail/ bond, restitution.
- Nearly 1 in 3 formerly incarcerated people were responsible for children at the time of their incarceration.

Why do the above findings from the report matter? Because when we consider the impact that incarceration has on real people and real families, we more deeply understand the stakes attached to finding substantial policy solutions to these problems. We can more clearly move toward those solutions when we have a truly inclusive democracy.

Senate Bill 571 would allow Oregonians who are incarcerated to exercise their constitutional right to vote and participate in elections.

The removal of voting rights should not be connected to punishment, which is why we urge you to vote yes on SB 571.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Michele Ruffin

Oregon Political Director

Forward Together Action