

March 2, 2021

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and Members of the Committee:

I am Dr. Barbara Ramirez Spencer, a board member of the YWCA of Greater Portland and an Oregon delegate for Vision 2020, who strongly supports Senate Bill 720 which directs the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission to establish, in collaboration with the Department of Corrections, the Family Preservation Project pilot program at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility.

The YWCA's Family Preservation Project (FPP) has been successful in promoting systematic change to help reduce the collateral damage of parental incarceration on children, families and the community. The FPP, supported by state, county and community leaders, takes an organic approach to overcome the profound consequences of prison through parenting programs and other wrap-around services for the incarcerated and newly released mothers, their children, and other providers of familial support. The FPP services have been shown to reduce recidivism for the women, promote positive parenting between mother and children, reduce the number of children placed in foster care, and increase successful academic, social, behavioral and emotional outcomes for children.

As a YWCA board member, I am a strong supporter of the Family Preservation Project. I have visited incarcerated women at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility to hear the stories of incarcerated mothers and to witness FPP program services first-hand. My assessment is that the Family Preservation Project under the leadership of the YWCA of Greater Portland has provided an evidenced-based solution to address the social, educational and mental health consequences of incarceration for mothers and families.

SB 720 would provide a missing piece to this program – an organizational structure and accountability within the Oregon state structure. The Oregon Criminal Justice Commission will collaborate with the Department of Corrections in partnering with the YWCA of Greater Portland to establish a pilot program for the Family Preservation Project. With adequate funding, investment and resources, the FPP will provide its array of services and be subjected to state review of its outcomes and effectiveness with reports submitted to the Legislature. This approach will ensure success and accountability to the families served, to the legislative assembly, as well as to the citizens of this state.

For these reasons, I urge you to cast an Aye vote on SB 720.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Ramirez Spencer, Ed.D

Portland, Oregon