



February 1, 2022

Dear Chair Bynum, Co-Chair Noble, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of Pro-Choice Oregon, we respectfully request your support for House Bill 4146, to provide for a trauma-informed, and gender- and culturally-responsive assessment and recommendations for policy change at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility.

At Pro-Choice Oregon, we advocate for the legal right of all individuals to choose if, when, and how they want to start and raise a family. These rights are inconsequential, however, if an individual cannot also access high quality health care, education and training opportunities, family support programs, and a living-wage job.

We aim to advance public policies centered on the lived experiences and intersections of communities that are most-impacted by barriers to essential reproductive and gender-affirming health care. In the last two years, we have focused on the unique experiences of justice-involved women and people who identify as gender non-binary, after hearing painful stories of those who have been unable to have full agency over their decisions impacting their reproductive health and ability to parent. We have heard stories of mothers unable to afford to call family members, those who were delayed access to an abortion by more than five weeks, stories of unsafe conditions when giving birth, stories of sexual assault, stories of racial discrimination, and know that there are many stories we haven't heard from people who are too afraid to speak out. We believe these stories and we want to create a process to ensure these stories inform better health outcomes and living conditions for all.

Pro-Choice Oregon was honored to participate in the Judicial Committee's Work Group on Gender Responsiveness during 2019-2020. During this time we were grateful for the opportunity to listen and learn from a number of compassionate and insightful members of our community, who have bravely shared their experiences as people who have been formerly incarcerated, and today, we are here to support them and one of their most important recommendations by supporting HB 4146.

We want to thank champions like Rep. Tawna Sanchez and Rep. Lisa Reynolds for recognizing the intersections of race, gender and incarceration, and the role these factors play in preventing many in our state from their ability to live and to raise families in safe and healthy conditions. We also know that our current corrections systems often deny basic rights¹ such as access to quality reproductive and pregnancy care, as well as regular family contact and support. This can have long term impacts, including a family member's ability to make a successful re-entry, or their ability to earn a living to care for themselves and their children. Black, Indigenous, and other people of color are often the most impacted, as these communities often face disproportionately long sentences.

¹ <https://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/>

Between 1978 and 2015, the rate of women² entering the criminal justice system in Oregon more than tripled.³ In addition, many women entering the criminal justice system are also experiencing a variety of other challenges, including poverty, trauma, domestic abuse, housing insecurity, and barriers that can prevent access to health care services.⁴ For women of color—the fastest growing populations impacted by incarceration—these factors are often exacerbated by institutional racism.⁵ And yet, there is no research to indicate that any of the aforementioned populations are committing any additional crime, especially with the crime rate sitting at an all-time low.

Time away from work and social networks can cause multi-generational harm and has a profound impact on the health and economic status of the incarcerated person, as well as their families. Currently 20,000 children in Oregon have a parent who is currently incarcerated. Of the people who are incarcerated at Coffee Creek, 80% are mothers. If measures are not taken to address the unique needs of the population they serve, many of which are impacted greatly by gender, race and the other underlying factors, it is clear the mass incarceration of women and caretakers will continue to impact our larger communities, and the harm will echo into future generations.

If we are not actively listening to and engaging the community members impacted by our institutions to mitigate this harm and reverse these trends, then we must recognize our complicity in the harm that is being caused. Oregon can take a first step in the right direction by passing HB 4146, to ensure we have the information and data needed to inform future policy. **If our state is truly ready to begin to address the harm caused by the corrections system, a system created and designed by men, for men, we need to listen and honor the feedback from those who have been directly harmed.** We support the hiring of a gender-responsive coordinator to establish a Gender-Responsive Advisory Council, to oversee a meaningful listening process, and to report back with a gender and trauma-informed, and culturally-responsive evaluation and recommendations for policy and system reform.

Pro-Choice Oregon and our trusted community partners are committed to reforming our correctional systems with a lens of racial justice and gender justice for all. We believe HB 4146 is a critical and needed step in Oregon's justice reform efforts, to better serve the unique needs of thousands of women and gender non-binary individuals who are currently incarcerated in Oregon. We urge your support of this bill.

Thank you,

Christel Allen
Executive Director
Pro-Choice Oregon

² Please note: Pro-Choice Oregon advocates for all people who are or may become pregnant. The vast majority of research in this subject is focused on cis women. More research is needed on the experiences and outcomes for trans people and/or people that identify as gender non-binary people currently incarcerated in prisons.

³ https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/OR_Women_Rates_1978_2015.html

⁴ <https://womensjustice.net/the-facts>

⁵ https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/women_overtime.html#drugs