



Date: February 9th, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Judiciary

From: Ronnie Strode, Policy Analyst for the Urban League of Portland

Re: Support for Restorative Justice Programs, SB 586

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 586. My name is Ronnie Strode and I am a Policy Analyst with the Urban League of Portland. The Urban League of Portland is one of Oregon's oldest civil rights and social service organizations, empowering African Americans and others to achieve equality in education, employment, health, economic security, and quality of life across Oregon and Southwest Washington.

Restorative justice is a victim-centered approach to justice that prioritizes the healing and restoration of relationships between those who have caused harm and the people they have affected. Rooted in the principles and values of indigenous cultures that understand that all things are interconnected through relationships, restorative justice practices acknowledge that when a harm or violation occurs, it ripples into the entire community and the first priority is the restoration of relationships among community members.¹ Restorative Justice programs offer an alternative to traditional justice by putting the needs and voices of all parties involved at the forefront. It is a holistic approach that changes someone's mind, instead of simply putting them in a box. In practice, restorative justice can take form through restitution or community service.

Most recently, in August of 2022, Multnomah County the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office, in partnership with Impact Justice, a Portland non-profit organization, created its restorative justice program. This program, based on a model developed in Oakland, offers a safe and healing space for a facilitated dialogue between the parties involved in a crime. This type of communication has been proven to be effective, as evidenced by the 91% approval rate from victims and a 44% reduction in recidivism.² Much like other forms of traditional counseling with a therapist or religious leader, restorative justice communications require confidentiality and a reasonable expectation of privacy to work best; confidentiality will foster the participants' maximum openness about the crime or the impact of the crime, by providing the participants with the knowledge that their communications will not be disclosed or used against them in subsequent proceedings.

Integral to ensuring the success of restorative justice programs is recognizing to whom its success will benefit. For reference, Multnomah County's restorative justice program focuses on eligible offenses carrying minimum sentences ranging from 5 years and 10 months to 7 years and 6 months. These presumptive sentences have an outsized impact on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in Multnomah County, as data reveals racial disparities among those charged with crimes within this sentencing range.



Specifically, while only 6% of Multnomah County is Black, Black defendants account for 41% of all robbery cases and 30% of all assault cases.³ Our current justice system, focused on punishment is not serving our communities; three-year recidivism rates waver between forty and fifty percent, and less than half of Oregon residents express a positive outlook/confidence in their county's district attorney.⁴ Maintaining the status quo will only continue this cycle of incarceration and recidivism, and further erosion of trust in our public institutions. Restorative justice practices offer a humane and reasonable method of fostering accountability and receiving justice.

I urge the committee to pass SB 586, which offers a promising solution to the impacts of crime and its effects on our communities by providing an opportunity for justice to be pursued on the terms of the victims and offenders, and promoting healing and restoration for all parties involved. The restorative justice program provides a victim-centered approach to justice that prioritizes the healing and restoration of relationships, which is particularly important for the Black community, who are disproportionately affected by the current system.

Respectfully,

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