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Oregon State Legislature
Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety

February 23, 2023

Co-Chairs Sollman and Evans and members of the Subcommittee on Public Safety:

RE: Support for SB 5541, Oregon Youth Authority

For almost ten years, I was the sole law enforcement member of Oregon's State Advisory Group, an advisory group required by the federal Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention Act; I served on the executive steering committee for the Oregon Juvenile Justice Assessment in 2017-18; and I presently represent the police chiefs and sheriffs in quarterly "partnership" meetings with Oregon Youth Authority (OYA). Subsequently, I am knowledgeable and interested in the mission and work of OYA. I am hopeful that you will support SB 5541 and make no cuts to OYA's budget.

OYA's mission is "to protect the public and reduce crime by holding youth accountable and providing opportunities for reformation in safe environments." It can be easily demonstrated that keeping OYA youth in an OYA facility does a better job of meeting that mission than moving the older youth to an adult DOC unit. The population of OYA youth, however, fluctuates, and, from my perspective as a police officer, I am quite hesitant to interpret any recent reduction in the OYA population as a long-term trend. Frankly, in addition to a small uptick in person and property felonies, we police are finding it increasingly common for too many people, including young people, to more quickly resolve conflict with violence. OYA is especially well-suited to steer convicted, felonious youth toward good citizenship.

OYA is also attentive to the victims of its incarcerated youth; however, OYA is unable to effectively and reliably collaborate with victims and victim advocates. As an integral part of its mission, OYA hopes to be much better at including victims' needs in its handling of its youth. Fortunately, to be much better does not require much cost: OYA currently has no one dedicated to working with and for victims yet needs just two positions to provide substantially better victim services, which, incidentally, are often tied to better outcomes for the offenders. I am hopeful you will ask OYA to explain this need and then fund it.

Thank you, sincerely,

John Teague
Chief of Police