

February 21, 2023



To: Chair Kropf, Vice-Chairs Andersen and the Committee

Wallen, and Members of

On behalf of the American Association of University Women of Oregon, we express our firm support for House Bill 2731.

Female inmates bring distinct needs to imprisonment, including the need to ameliorate the effects of fractured families, past trauma, poverty, and the need to deal with the emotional challenges associated with being a primary caregiver to a child who has to have been left behind. Once released, these women face much higher rates of unemployment and homelessness and are less likely to have a high school education compared to formerly incarcerated men.<sup>1</sup>

The children and family members of incarcerated women are often "hidden victims" of a parent's incarceration.<sup>2</sup> These effects are associated with challenges such as psychological strain, antisocial behavior, suspension or expulsion from school, economic hardship and criminal behavior. The most significant factor that is associated with a child's ability to overcome these challenges and succeed in life is the parent-child bond.

The Family Preservation Project meets these challenges head on and, guided by gender-specific, trauma informed and multidisciplinary supports, seeks to foster a foundation for future family success. It recognizes that the maintenance of contact with the incarcerated parent is the single most important factor in supporting a child's attachments to his or her parents, siblings and other family members.<sup>3</sup> A variety of counseling, educational and co-support processes also help families deal with the emotional trauma and anxiety of incarceration and reentry into the community.

This program also essentially pays for itself by reducing the recidivism rate of its participants, supporting families in ways that reduce the need for foster care, and improving long term the outcomes of child participants.

Under the wings of this Project, women at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility have been connected with their children and been provided with supervised visits, parent coaching, wraparound services, resource centers

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<sup>1</sup> Wendy Sawyer, Prison Policy Initiative, *Who's helping the 1.9 million women released from prisons and jails each year?*, July 19, 2019, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2019/07/19/reentry>

<sup>2</sup> Eric Martin, *Hidden Consequences: The Impact of Incarceration on Dependent Children*, March 1, 2017, <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/hidden-consequences-impact-incarceration-dependent-children>

<sup>3</sup> Children of Incarcerated Parents Bill of Rights, <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/hidden-consequences-impact-incarcerationdependent-children>

and post-prison support. Results have been positive, including reduced recidivism and placement of children in care, as well as increasing academic, social and emotional outcomes for the inmates and their children.

AAUW of OR urges the passage of House Bill 2731. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this bill.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Claire Berger State Public Policy Chair, American Association of University Women of Oregon*

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