

SB 5506 Public Testimony in support of CJC's Restorative Justice Grant Program

Scott Smith, on behalf of Center for Dialogue and Resolution, Lane County

April 21, 2023

Chair Steiner, Chair Sanchez, and members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means,

My name is Scott Smith, and I am the Restorative Justice Program Manager at the Center for Dialogue and Resolution, a community-based organization that serves Lane County. This letter is to draw attention to the exciting and effective work that has been empowered by the Restorative Justice Grant Program of the Criminal Justice Commission. This fund is still in its first biennium, and has already made a game-changing impact in several Oregon counties.

Restorative Justice (RJ) is an approach to dealing with harms, including criminal harms, that centers the needs of those victimized, and their communities, while also providing pathways for responsible parties to take active accountability, and take steps to prevent future harms. Many studies show that victims and survivors who go through an RJ process have much higher satisfaction than after a court process; that recidivism rates are lower for responsible parties who complete an RJ process than those who are sentenced in court; and that the financial cost of taking a case through an RJ process is much lower than taking it through the court/incarceration/supervision process.

Most of the funds allocated by the Restorative Justice Grant Program go to community-based organizations that partner with their circuit court and district attorney's office. For a modest investment compared to much other public safety programming, these programs greatly increase the possibility of meeting the specific and varied needs of victims and communities, while easing the burden on public systems and guiding responsible people to make meaningful repair and changes.

The program I oversee has been in such a partnership with the Lane County Circuit Court for about eight years. With the award we received from this grant program, we have been able to double the number of cases we can accept from the court, as well as provide more thorough

service in each case. This has resulted not only in more cases resolved without burdening the public system, but an increase in the completion rate for responsible parties that enter our program. In March alone, we were able to notify the court of nine completed cases.

The RJ Grant Program of the CJC has funded several other new programs, which are just now taking their first cases or piloting their processes. These are local solutions based on local priorities, and public-nonprofit partnerships. If the funding were not renewed for the coming biennium, this would undermine the investment that Oregon has already made to get these programs up and running. So, in a year of difficult budget decisions, please protect this item in the CJC budget, supporting the continued development of this highly impactful public safety programming.

Thank you for your time, and your efforts in this budget season.

Sincerely,

Scott Smith

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