

Submitter: Erica Washington
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

I submit this testimony on behalf of the Restorative Justice Project at Impact Justice. We are a national technical assistance and training provider that partners with communities across the nation to launch community-based programs that address harm using restorative justice. For the past two years, we've partnered with The Insight Alliance, the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office (MCDAO), Metropolitan Public Defenders Office, and interested community members to develop and launch the Restorative Roots Project. Responsible people and people harmed are diverted to the Project to participate in a Restorative Community Conferencing process that includes preparation, a facilitated dialogue through which participants speak to the harm and impact, and the creation of a consensus based plan to address the harm. Upon the completion of that plan, criminal charges are dismissed by MCDAO.

Without the Restorative Justice Grant Program (RJGP), the Restorative Roots Project would not exist. Through the RJGP, Multnomah County system partners and community-based partners came together to establish shared values, design eligibility criteria, finalize a Memorandum of Understanding, train for their respective roles, and ultimately launch a community-based, survivor-centered restorative justice program. The Restorative Roots Project began receiving referrals in August of 2022 and, though in its infancy, has the momentum needed to offer substantial healing and transformation for those impacted by violent crime, both people harmed and those responsible for that harm.

Continued financial support through the RJGP is critical to the Restorative Roots Project's ability to continue their important work. In the wise words of Buckminster Fuller, "you never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete." We too often fall short of the investment necessary to facilitate the critical "building" aspect of change. With the continuation of RJGP support, the Restorative Roots Project will continue to facilitate Restorative Community Conferences to address incidents of serious harm, will evaluate data gathered on the pilot to make improvements to the program, use the RJGP investment to attract diversified additional funding, increase internal capacity, and increase case referrals from the Multnomah system partners. With over a decade of experience building and launching restorative justice programs across the country, we see the clear potential of the Restorative Roots Project to bring about a change that so many advocates of healing, safety, accountability, and community are desperately calling for. For these reasons, we ask that the legislature

approve continued funding for the Restorative Justice Grant Program.