

TO: Ways & Means Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez, and Members of the Committee
DATE: May 5, 2023
RE: SUPPORT THE FAMILY PRESERVATION PROJECT/HB 2731

Dear Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez and members of the Committee,

My name is Laura Johnson and I am writing to urge you to please fund the Family Preservation Project/HB 2731. The bill creates in statute and funds the Family Preservation Project (FPP), which mitigates the impacts of parental incarceration on kids in Oregon that have a parent in prison. The program also secures almost a dollar-for-dollar match from private funds AND saves the state at least that much in other costs related to incarcerated moms and their children.

FPP has impacted the lives of thousands of Oregon mothers and children, providing services to help incarcerated women and their children overcome cycles of poverty, trauma, and intergenerational involvement in the criminal justice system.

In my work with Sponsors over the past eight years, I have been afforded many opportunities to witness the way that participation in FPP facilitates healthy reunification between mothers and their children post-release. We know that 80 percent of the women incarcerated at Coffee Creek are the sole providers for a child at the time of their conviction. A sentence should be served by the person convicted and not the entire family. But incarceration has collateral consequences and the ripple effect on children is extraordinary. The women I have had the privilege to walk alongside in my work want the very best for their children. They do not want their own missteps to have further negative implications for their kids. And their kids need their moms, no matter what they did or where they are living or how much money their family has to pay for video visits or gas money. They need to know they are loved, and they need to be afforded opportunities to maintain connection. The barriers to maintaining that bond are overwhelming. FPP helps to overcome those barriers and to facilitate that continued connection between mothers and children – during and following incarceration.

Finally, funding FPP helps to actualize the Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents. It is critical that we as a community and as a state recognize the needs and prioritize the rights of children of incarcerated parents from the time of their parent's arrest through incarceration. We must do better.

Funding FPP ensures fewer children are placed in foster care, incarcerated moms are less likely to go back to prison, and children of participants are exhibiting successful outcomes - academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally.

Thank you for your leadership and for your commitment to Oregon. Please support HB 2731 so that these critical supports and services remain in place. Oregon's kids deserve them.

Sincerely,

Laura Johnson
Eugene, OR