

TO: Ways & Means Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez, and Members of the Committee
DATE: May 4, 2023
RE: SUPPORT THE FAMILY PRESERVATION PROJECT/HB 2731

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

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 as well as saving the state from incurring other costs I speak to below that are related to the negative cycle of incarceration.

FPP has impacted the lives of thousands of Oregon mothers and children, providing services to help incarcerated women including my sister and her two children. Our family was lucky to have some means (car, gas, time) to support at a basic level what it takes to keep a family connected. For many other families this is literally a battle to overcome the cycles of poverty, trauma, and intergenerational involvement with the criminal justice system that can perpetuate when a mother is arrested.

I support FPP because it helped my sister and her two children stay bonded while she was incarcerated at Coffee Creek for approximately 3 years. The program gave her hope and motivation that the relationship with her kids could be salvaged. They all gained emotional growth skills through the program's training to discuss the trauma that was created by incarceration. Computer and other job skills were taught through the FPP trainings. The community of the mothers who were participants bond these women together, many of whom are now still very close, with a common goal to heal themselves, take responsibility for their choices, mend the damage to their family and become productive members of society again. Without FPP this would not have been possible to start the healing and loss of trust between mother and child while still serving a sentence. For myself and my mom it was an opportunity to also build back a relationship within our family that had been in turmoil for years, to reset it, and move forward while still at Coffee Creek.

The Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents needs programs like FPP to be funded so that it can give life to these rights and put a spotlight on these children. Funding FPP helps families that are struggling to find a connection back to the lives on the outside that are the most important parts of their futures. 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. 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 do not go away.

Sincerely,

Nathan Sweet
Portland, OR