



**Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety Hearing
HB 5041
March 27, 2025**

**Testimony of Aliza B. Kaplan, Professor and Director of the Criminal Justice Reform
Clinic at Lewis & Clark Law School**

Co-Chairs Senator Broadman and Representative Evans and members of the Committee:

My name is Aliza Kaplan. I am a law professor and the Director of the Criminal Justice Reform Clinic at Lewis & Clark Law School.

One of the Criminal Justice Reform Clinic's projects is our Youth Legal Clinic (YLC), where we provide legal information and navigation to incarcerated youth in Oregon's closed facilities throughout the State. YLC's attorney and law students under my supervision regularly visit MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility and Oak Creek Correctional Facility, along with semester or yearly visits at all the other facilities. Approximately 30 youth per month reach out to YLC to talk to with us or to ask questions related to legal issues. Through this project, we do not directly represent youth, but we assist them in legal research, filling out legal paperwork, accessing legal resources and forms, explaining their rights, ensuring they know statutes of limitations for their appeals, and connecting them to their lawyers and *pro bono* attorneys. We have had a contract with the Oregon Youth Authority since 2018 to provide these baseline legal services. In addition, over the last ten years, the Criminal Justice Reform Clinic has individually represented incarcerated youth in their motions to set aside, post-conviction relief cases, and clemency cases. All of this is to say that we spend a lot of time at OYA facilities—working directly with and getting to know the youth housed in its facilities.

For youth to leave OYA custody and be productive and safe individuals, OYA needs to be adequately funded. Recognizing the financial situation the state is in, the legislature must, at the very least, continue funding the agency at its current level.

OYA needs to be fully staffed and able to provide educational and vocational programs and treatment services to its youth. It needs expert counselors and case managers that care about the youth and can focus on the youth's trauma, behavioral and mental health issues and drug and alcohol addictions. And it must do this in a time of major change. Just like all institutions, OYA is managing the post-COVID era—having a difficult time recruiting, hiring, and maintaining staff. Because of this, youth are suffering from more behavioral and mental health challenges than ever before. On top of that, OYA's population has dramatically shifted due to changes in the law and OYA no longer has a significant group of older youth to act as mentors to the younger youth.

Many of the facilities have never regained sufficient staff or volunteers to return to their pre-COVID activities, especially in the facilities in eastern and southern Oregon. In our experience speaking to youth and visiting facilities around the State, incarcerated youth need more opportunities and activities to keep them engaged and learning, not less. This requires funding. Finally, the only way OYA can be successful at any of its facilities is by ensuring the safety of its youth; this can only happen when its infrastructure, services, and systems are working properly and with the youth's needs at the forefront.

At a minimum, OYA needs to at least be funded at its current level to fulfill its responsibilities to the youth we incarcerate.

Thank you for your time.