



May 13, 2013

To: House Committee on Human Services and Housing

From: Paul Solomon, Executive Director, Sponsors, Inc.

**Re: Prisoner Reentry Services and Transitional Housing**

Chair Tomei and Members of the Committee:

My name is Paul Solomon and I am the Executive Director at Sponsors in Eugene. I have worked at Sponsors for the last 12 years and serve on a number of boards and committees related to public safety. This year Sponsors has the distinction of having provided reentry services in Oregon for 40 years. We currently operate 10 buildings on 5 sites providing transitional, long term and permanent housing to people with criminal histories. Over the years we have been able to develop a range of programs based on research and best practices in the field. We provide a variety of on-site programs to augment our housing, including: a federally funded Mentoring Program; Cognitive Behavioral Therapy; a "one stop" Reentry Resource Center; a Veteran's Program; an Education Program; Drug and Alcohol treatment (that we contract out); services for sex offenders; and targeted programs for women and their children.

Over the last 25 years we have incrementally increased our portfolio of housing programs. Yet, we have not been able to meet the overwhelming need of people releasing from prison, our transitional beds are booked for the next 10 months. In 2010, we opened a new 72 bed facility that is seen as a "model" for transitional housing in Oregon. This \$6 million project came about through a unique partnership between Sponsors and the Lane County Housing Authority. The project was fully funded with Low Income Housing Tax Credits, VA Grant and Per Diem Capital funding, and a mix of private foundation support and individual contributions. This facility also houses our Byrne Grant funded Reentry Resource Center that I just mentioned. As Doug and Kiki have described, the Reentry Resource Centers are one example of collaborative, community based programs that are cost effective and make our community safer.

One of the biggest challenges that we have faced along with others in Oregon, attempting to provide reentry services, has been the lack of dedicated funding for reentry services. When Senate Bill 1145 passed in 1995 (modifying the Community Corrections Act) it gave counties state funding to assume responsibility of offenders sentenced 12 months or less (for new crimes or violating release conditions) and to manage parole and

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probation (previously a state agency). Historically, the state has allocated upward to \$200 million per biennium to pay for supervision, sanctions, and other services. SB 1145 gave counties autonomy in how those dollars were spent on various public safety services. Since the passage of SB1145 Sponsors has consistently received some level of funding to provide transitional housing and reentry services. However, if you look around the state, many counties do not prioritize using "Community Corrections" funds for reentry services. Regardless of the funding source, as the economy has contracted, we have witnessed profound cuts to reentry and treatment services. In 2011, Lane County reduced Sponsors' funding by 52%. Other programs around the state have experienced similar funding cuts.

One of the problems with our current funding model for reentry (or lack thereof) is that many people releasing from prison homeless may or may not have access to services based on where they are released. I get between 40-50 letters a week from men and women in state prison. Approximately 1 out of 4 or 5 of these letters are from inmates releasing to other counties, requesting housing at Sponsors because of the lack of transitional housing in their respective counties. We need to look for ways to foster new programs. Non-profits are uniquely positioned to provide these services, but require start-up funding and support from their local public safety partners.

Siting new programs can be a real challenge. We had over 30 years of experience when we were attempting to site our Men's Sex Offender Housing Program 10 years ago. Despite the fact that the property was zoned appropriately and not in the middle of a residential neighborhood, there was a fair amount of community push-back. Fortunately, we were able to mitigate the challenge by going to neighborhood association meetings; we went door to door with parole and probation, and tried to dispel some of the myths and fears associated with housing sex offenders. Ultimately, we prevailed and that program has operated without a problem since we started.

Many of us in this room have recently testified or supported the passage of HB 3194 because we recognize the value of downsizing prison spending while increasing our support of local interventions. For too many years, we have disproportionately invested in our state prison system at the expense of funding for reentry services and community corrections. We have a much better opportunity to provide meaningful interventions at the local level that will keep people out of prison, with proper funding. These more effective and efficient local control options need to be made robust as part of the reinvestment, as proposed in HB 3194 from state corrections savings.

In recent years, we have started using validated risk assessment tools to determine who gets access to our programs. Using the Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) principle, we provide treatment interventions primarily with higher risk offenders while targeting criminogenic predictors of crime and recidivism. In addition, our programs are responsive to the risk and needs of each individual client, tailoring the right types of cognitive behavioral approach's in the proper dosage. Research has shown that non-adherence to RNR principles in service delivery is not only ineffective, but can also be detrimental to offender treatment outcomes.

This year thousands of men and women will leave Oregon prisons and return to our communities. The question we need to answer, is under what conditions will they return. Will they arrive at our bus stations, homeless, indigent and high risk to re-offend, with nowhere to go? Or will we provide supportive housing and evidence-based interventions that will help them become self-sufficient, taxpaying, law abiding members of our community?