From: judith armatta
To: DeJong Annola
Subject: HB 2549
Date: Wednesday, February 27, 2013 1:02:00 PM

Honorable Chair Barker, Committee Members:

I write to urge your support of HB 2549, which attempt to inject needed fairness into the legal system's treatment of sex offenders.

I am a long time victim's advocate, former counsel to the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. I am also related to a young man who was convicted of a sex offense, i.e. rape III, for engaging in consensual sex with a girl who held herself out to be 18, but was in fact a 15 year old runaway. He was 20 and homeless at the time.

The term sex offender refers to a broad range of behavior from public urination, sexting, and statutory rape to serial rape and child sexual abuse. When all these behaviors are treated the same, society becomes less safe as scarce resources are focused on people who are not dangerous as well as those who well may present a current threat. This provides the public with a false sense of security. HB 2549, by providing for levels of sex offenders, begins to address this concern.

While I support the bill, I urge the Committee to provide for a broader evaluation than application of a single risk assessment tool. When my nephew was in prison for probation violations, his correctional counselor applied the Static-99 assessment tool to his record (it is a paper review only) and concluded he was a predatory sex offender. The Parole Board upheld the decision. Fortunately, the process required the Parole Board to secure evaluation of my nephew by an outside, independent psychologist. She concluded he was absolutely not a predatory sex offender and did not present any future danger. She also admonished the Board and correctional counselor for wrongly assessing him in the first place.

I urge the Committee to require the Department of Corrections to provide for an individual evaluation in addition to application of an assessment tool as well as an opportunity for an independent review of Parole Board decisions. As you know, the consequences of being labeled a predatory sex offender are grave and have serious long term negative impacts on a person's life.

With these cautions, I urge the Committee to act favorably on HB 2549.

Respectfully,

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