



March 23, 2017

The Honorable Jeff Barker, Chair
The Honorable Andy Olson, Vice Chair
The Honorable Jennifer Williamson, Vice Chair
House Judiciary Committee Members

Re: House Bill 3176

Dear Chair Barker and Members,

On behalf of the Oregon Justice Resource Center, I respectfully request your support for HB 3176.

The Oregon Justice Resource Center (OJRC) is a public interest law firm that represents justice-involved individuals and advocates for criminal justice reform in Oregon. We operate and administer several distinct projects that provide direct legal assistance to Oregonians who would otherwise not have access to legal services.

I have the privilege of directing the OJRC's Women in Prison Project. The goals of the Women in Prison Project are to ensure that the criminal justice system treats women fairly, protects their health and safety, and makes it possible for them to successfully rejoin their communities when they are released. Through this project, I provide civil reentry legal services to women incarcerated in Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCF) and hear directly from incarcerated women and formerly incarcerated women about the circumstances surrounding their criminal activity.

It is through this work in my role as Director of the Women in Prison Project that I hear from justice-involved women that they have been victims of domestic violence, and it is not unusual for me to hear that domestic violence contributed to the commission of their crimes. Most commonly, women share that they participated in the crime or were at the scene of the crime because they felt pressured, coerced, or threatened by their abusive partner.

Stories such as these rooted in trauma are all too common. I spoke with one woman who had no prior involvement with the criminal justice system until she found herself in an abusive relationship with a partner who began committing property crimes related to his drug addiction. As a result of the physical abuse, being continuously threatened, and feeling scared and trapped in the relationship, she assisted her partner in his criminal activity. This woman, who had steady employment her whole adult life, had always been the primary caregiver for her minor children, and had no criminal record, was convicted and sentenced to a prison term of over eight years.

Experiences such as these are borne out by data. In 2007, a study by Western Michigan University looked at women on probation and parole in Lane County, Oregon. Women who answered affirmatively to a number of abuse-related screening questions were interviewed and

their data collected. The authors concluded that the women appeared to have experienced “intimate terrorism”, including both physical and emotional abuse. Furthermore, the report highlighted that in Lane County, 29% of women on probation or parole reported that they “committed a crime because they were threatened by their partner.” This conforms with past studies of incarcerated women that have found “relationships with men were at the core of their offending behavior.”

While we recognize that HB 3176 will not allow for consideration of domestic violence in the sentencing of all cases, we believe this is a notable first step toward recognizing the role domestic violence plays in women’s intersection with the criminal justice system.

We urge you to support of HB 3176.

Sincerely,

Julia Yoshimoto
Attorney and Project Director
Women in Prison Project and Reentry Law Project
Oregon Justice Resource Center

