

Submitted to the House Committee On Early Childhood and Family Supports
By Shannon Wight, Deputy Director, Partnership for Safety and Justice
Informational Hearing
May 18, 2017

Chair Lively, members of the committee:

Partnership for Safety and Justice (PSJ) is a nonprofit organization that advances solutions to crime that ensure justice, equity, accountability, and healing. We do this by advocating for proven strategies that achieve safe and strong communities, prevent crime, and provide opportunities for both victims and people who commit crimes to rebuild their lives.

I would like to start by thanking the committee for holding this hearing today. Too often public safety conversations are siloed in judiciary and public safety committees. Crime is often seen as happening between two people, when in fact crime impacts communities and most significantly, it impacts children and families. When parents are victims of crime or are incarcerated for committing a crime, children and families feel the impact.

In Oregon, we know that 75% of the women in prison are mothers and the majority of those women are mothers to young children. We also know that 40% of foster children have a parent in prison. It is also important to note that incarceration does not impact all Oregon families equally, African American children are seven times more likely to have a parent who is incarcerated and while we don't have great data, we also know that Native American Oregonians are disproportionately impacted by the justice system. We need more policies and programs that help support families impacted by crime and violence.

In 2015, PSJ worked with Representatives Williamson and Olson to pass one such policy - the Family Sentencing Alternative Program. The bill passed with broad bipartisan support and with strong support from groups that advocate for victims of crime because the vast majority of women in prison have also been victims of physical and sexual violence.

Oregon's Family Sentencing Alternative Program (FSAP) is modeled after a program in Washington State that has shown success in creating better outcomes for children and parents. Like the Washington program, under Oregon's program parents convicted of certain drug and property crimes can be diverted from prison and into intensive probation combined with services like addiction treatment and skill building classes to improve their parenting.

The program is driven by an effort to keep custodial parents united with their children as they are held accountable for drug or property crimes. The Family Sentencing Alternative Program is changing the lives of the parents who participate and their children.

FSAP has been implemented as a pilot program in five counties: Jackson, Marion, Multnomah, Deschutes and Washington. While the program has only been operational for a short time, the Department of Corrections has already observed positive impacts on the individuals participating including: increased client patience with their children, increased engagement and motivation to be successful while on supervision, and increased enthusiasm about the future.

After visiting four of the five pilot sites, we are bringing a bill based on feedback from the counties implementing the program to expand eligibility for a greater number of parents, including pregnant women. If Oregon was not facing a budget deficit, we would be advocating for its expansion to additional counties.

The FSAP is the kind of program we need more of - that can take into account the complexities of people's lives and mitigate the impact of our criminal justice policies on children and families. The Family Sentencing Alternative Program represents forward thinking public safety policy that is rooted in achieving and measuring the best outcomes, supporting children and families and creating stronger and safer communities.