



**PARTNERSHIP FOR  
SAFETY & JUSTICE**

**Submitted to the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety  
Thursday, March 7, 2019**

**Testimony in Support of HB 5541  
By Shannon Wight, Deputy Director, Partnership for Safety and Justice**

Co-Chair Winters, Co-Chair Piluso, and Members of the Subcommittee,

Partnership for Safety and Justice is a statewide, non-profit organization that advocates for public safety and criminal justice policies. For nearly 20 years, our work has advanced state and local solutions that ensure accountability, equity, and healing for people convicted of crime, crime survivors, and the families and communities of both.

On behalf of Partnership for Safety and Justice, I respectfully request your support of SB 5541.

We fundamentally believe in the mission and the good work of Oregon Youth Authority's current and past leadership which has set long term plans for continued improvement of their agency. The strategic and long term planning they've developed around its physical plant, programming and staff training are consistent with a vision for youth reformation. This alignment stands out for its comprehensive and consistent approach.

Partnership for Safety and Justice has engaged in many capacities with youth and staff at the Oregon Youth Authority, and we continue to be impressed with their current practices and consistent striving for even better outcomes. We have partnered with SEIU (the union that represents OYA staff) to learn more about their challenges and successes in their roles, and PSJ staff and board have attended theatrical productions at MacLaren.

Additionally, OYA reached out to PSJ to have us sit on their Use of Isolation Community Advisory Committee. I sat on that committee for three years and watched OYA staff work to change the culture around the use of isolation in their facilities. They took advice from committee members, regularly toured us through the facilities, and allowed us to meet with youth out of earshot of staff. As the work progressed, they conducted trainings in all facilities and did the hard, slow work of changing minds and practices.

It's far easier to pass a bill or change a policy than to change culture, which is where the real transformation needs to take place. For example, the legislature almost passed a bill to end the use of isolation at OYA, but we and others knew that that could lead to unintended consequences if staff didn't have other options for addressing difficult behaviors. The use of isolation at OYA has reduced 70% due to their commitment to inviting community input and doing the work of changing institutional culture.

For these reasons, we strongly support the Oregon Youth Authority, and we urge your support for HB 5541.