

Barry Shapiro
5374 Forest Ridge Rd. NE
Silverton, OR 97381
barryshap914@gmail.com

March 25, 2019

re: SB 969, SB 966/SB 1008, SB 968

To Whom It May Concern:

I am an artist, teacher and advocate for at-risk youth. For over eight years, I have had the honor and privilege of teaching art and photography to incarcerated kids in the Oregon Youth Authority system. I began with programming at Hillcrest in Salem. The bulk of my interaction has been at the Oak Creek facility for young women, in Albany. I say it has been an honor and privilege and mean that sincerely. Many of these kids have never had the opportunity to express themselves or to be heard and/or treated with the kind of respect every human being deserves. Although they have all been convicted of crimes, they are also victims. They are the victims of poverty and abuse, of a marginalized society.

During my very first teaching opportunity at Oak Creek, I met a 17-year-old young woman who had been charged as an adult on a Measure 11 offense. During her time at the facility, she studied, earning not a GED, but a high school diploma. She worked in the laundry and kitchen. She learned skills and became a mentor to the younger inmates. She was charged with caring for a shelter dog and displayed an extraordinary level of care and compassion. Over the course of the time I knew her, I watched her grow and develop. I cannot praise the work of the staff and administration at Oak Creek highly enough. They *are* the change. As is the law for Measure 11 offenders, she was shipped up to Coffee Creek upon turning twenty-five. All the advances, the therapy and education were jeopardized by her being warehoused in the overcrowded adult facility. After taxpayers were charged with paying over three hundred dollars a day for over eight years, there appeared to be little "return on investment." There is a guardedly happy ending to this story. Earlier this year, Governor Brown commuted Vanessa Morris' sentence and she is now in the process of rebuilding her life.

Not all the stories end on such a positive note. One of the participants in the arts programming was particularly troubled. Her mother had been a drug addict, and her father a gang member. She had been bounced from one abusive situation to another, one bad foster home after another, over twenty in all. She had an altercation at Oak Creek and, although only eighteen, was shipped to Coffee Creek. DOC claimed they were unaware of her medical/psychological

history, even though her numerous suicide attempts had been well documented. One attempt left her in a coma. Nonetheless, she was sent to the adult prison. Less than a week later, she was dead. Precious Amor Anderson had a smile that could light up a room. She had dreams like every other kid. She wanted to go to college. She was certainly bright enough. Instead, she fell through the cracks. I've attached an example of her work.

I most recently taught at Oak Creek at the end of last year. I again encountered a young woman charged as an adult in a Measure 11 offense in our class. She was seventeen when charged. It was her first offense and had never been in trouble before. As she told it, she was offered a twenty-year sentence by the district attorney – a take-it or leave-it proposition. Her alternative was fifty-four years in prison, effectively a life sentence. Unlike others, she doesn't come from a broken home. Her family has been supportive and is working to try to help her, but without a second look or the continued use of Measure 11, there is little they – or anyone else – can do.

With passage of SB 966, you will prevent the overly harsh process of kids "aging out" and sent to adult prison. It would help direct funds toward rehabilitation and effectively transition youth back into the world. It would save money and save lives.

Since getting involved in the work of OYA and especially Oak Creek, I have learned a great deal about the issues involved. While statistics can only go so far in explaining the challenges faced, it is important to note, nearly three-quarters of all female juvenile offenders suffer from symptoms of PTSD. Sexual, physical and drug abuse are rampant. Again, these kids are as much victims as criminals.

Over the years, I have met and lobbied many legislators to find ways to end the draconian approach of Measure 11. While most have agreed with me, nothing has been done. The notion of being "tough on crime" has proven to be counterproductive. Mandatory minimums do nothing to deter crime. Instead, they have cost the state millions and have effectively ruined lives. The mission of the OYA, the courts and our laws are to rehabilitate. In that, we have been failing miserably. It is critical that you as lawmakers support SB 1008 and institute second-look hearings. We need to take the responsibility for our children out of the hands of politically elected DA's and put it back into the hands of judges, where it belongs. And this applies to SB 969 as well; there is no benefit to charge children as adults. In this regard, passage of SB 968 is critical.

It doesn't seem that long ago that the state legislature approved HB 3194, aimed at investing in transition and reentry programming and community facilities. It was an effort to guide youth offenders back into the world and help make them productive contributors to society. Somehow, the funds got allotted to other programs. One of the young women I taught during the last art program at Oak Creek told me how much she was gaining from being there. Her biggest fear, she said, was what would happen when she was released. This is a real concern, shared by many of the youth offenders. In order to get the most from our investment, we need to make the road back a positive one. More than once, I have heard about kids who have been released who, by law, are compelled to return to where they committed their crime. This law

was passed to ease concerns by the population in Salem, but it goes counter to everything we know and have learned. Before getting involved in juvenile justice reform, I was active in gang intervention. One of the first lessons someone in the field understands is you simply cannot send an offender back to “the scene of the crime” and expect positive results. We all know better. Ignoring the facts is damaging, not only to the offenders but to society in general.

I urge you, consider – and support – these four bills.

Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,



Barry Shapiro

Enc

