



March 28, 2019

To: The Honorable Floyd Prozanski, Chair; The Honorable Kim Thatcher, Vice-Chair; Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

Re: Children First for Oregon supports youth justice reform, SB 1008, SB 969, SB 968, SB 966

Children First represents the interests of Oregon's nearly 875,000 children and believes that together, with communities and leaders across the state, we can build a state where all children thrive. Through the development of the Children's Agenda we work with our more than 110 partner organizations to identify and elevate legislative concepts that will support the needs of Oregon's children. Youth Justice Reform (SB 1008, SB 969, SB 968, SB 966) is part of the 2019 Children's Agenda, and these bills are being actively supported by many of our partners.

We join Oregonians from across the state in believing that our youth justice system should focus on prevention and rehabilitation, and that it is our responsibility to provide youth with the best chance to repair the damage they've caused, while also healing their own trauma and getting them the help they need.

We support the following four proposals in front of the legislature this session that focus on prevention and rehabilitation for youth in the criminal justice system:

- **SB 969 (End Automatic Waiver into Adult Court)** places youth accused of any crimes in the juvenile justice system instead of the adult justice system. To move a youth to the adult justice system, prosecutors would need to request a special hearing with a judge who would decide where youth are placed.
- **SB 966 (Hearing Before Transfer to DOC)** would require an additional review before a youth with a long sentence would be transferred to an adult prison. Currently, Oregon youth who are given long sentences can stay in a youth prison until age twenty-five and are then transferred to an adult prison. This proposal would allow a judge to determine if the twenty-five-year old has been sufficiently rehabilitated to transfer them to community-based supervision, rather than adult prison.
- **SB 1008 (Second Look Hearings)** establishes a process where all youth who are convicted in adult court have access to a "Second Look" hearing half way through their



sentence. At that hearing, a judge determines whether the youth has taken responsibility for their crime and been rehabilitated, which would allow the remainder of their sentence to be served under community-based supervision, rather than being incarcerated.

- **SB 968 (End Juvenile Life Without Parole)** would eliminate life without parole sentences for youth in Oregon by establishing a process to ensure that anyone convicted of a crime when they are under eighteen years old receives a chance for parole after fifteen years of incarceration.

Research shows that young people have a great ability to grow and change and that treatment and education programs, not prisons, are the best way to help youth make better choices, stay on a path towards success, and get back on track when they need help. Studies also show youth who are placed in the adult justice system are over thirty percent more likely to commit additional crimes upon release than those in the youth justice system. Placing youth in the youth justice system is better for the youth and keeps our communities safer. We should shift to what works, and this package of bills will allow us to reform our youth justice system.

We ask that you support the Youth Justice Reform package of bills - SB 1008, SB 969, SB 968, SB 966. Thank you for your attention and service.

Sincerely,

Chris Coughlin  
Legislative Director