

To the Oregon Senate Judiciary Committee members. I support your efforts to come in compliance with the United State Supreme Court ruling in the case of Miller v. Alabama. I understand there are a series of bills (SB 966, 968, 969, and 1008) being proposed to do just that. I agree that it is time for Juveniles to be treated fairly and humanely, going forward. I agree with giving them a chance to discover who they are, heal their own trauma and repair the damage that they caused. They need resources that support them in their growth to becoming productive citizens. I'm glad to see the State want to prevent future felons early in their life cycle.

I also have concern for those teenagers (now adults) who were convicted and serving life sentences currently with no opportunity for parole. I understand that there are 46 inmates who fall into this category. I feel sad and disappointed, because I long for equity and humane treatment for these folks as well. They remain in Oregon State Prisons, an environment that is designed to be punitive. Whatever healing that happens for them is because of their own personal efforts. I think it is time for the state of Oregon to take a "second look" at their cases, too; their personal growth, their acceptance of responsibility for mistakes that they made long ago as teenagers, their professional talents and abilities: all combining to make them credible candidates for reconsideration. We continue to do them an injustice by continuing to perpetrate what we now know causes harm. Let us work to right that wrong, too.

I have spent the last 9 years as a volunteer, going in the Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP), on a weekly basis, working with inmates on a process called, Nonviolent Communication. I have personally worked with several of those 46 inmates. My experience has taught me that they are all human beings deserving of humane treatment and consideration. They have been serving their time, healing themselves and in many cases, giving back to the prison community and their fellow inmates in very supportive ways, such as through hospice, being available to lend a listening ear, etc. I have watched folks behind bars change, soften, breakdown in deep sadness, remorse and regret for the horrendous damage their have caused others. Yet, there is no current way that I have seen for their humane actions, personal healing, and professional development and growth to be seen and considered an integral part of what it takes to pay their debt to society. I hope someday we can use that as the standard instead of just time served or once a convict, always a convict.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

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