

YWCA IS ON A MISSION

March 28, 2019

Jennifer Williamson, Chair
House Judiciary Committee
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Williamson, Vice-Chairs Sprenger and Gorsek, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

First, thank you to many of you for your past visits with women from the Family Preservation Project/Oregon Center for Incarcerated Mothers and Their Children - they truly appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about their experiences and share with you their passion for the work!

We wanted to share with you that there will be legislation considered on Thursday, March 28th at 1 pm in the House Judiciary Committee that will:

1. Define and fund the Oregon Center for Incarcerated Mothers and Their Children.
 - The Center is the expanded version of the Family Preservation Project, which started with a small, intensive program and now encompasses multiple tiers of service for individuals identifying as female on the minimum side of Coffee Creek Correctional Facility.
 - The funding would be allocated to the Criminal Justice Commission to then be allocated to the YWCA of Greater Portland to administer the Center. The YWCA has administered the work since 2015, though the program has been in existence in one form or another since the early 2000's.
2. Create a Gender Responsive Officer within the Department of Corrections that is responsible for:
 - Conducting a gender responsive assessment of the Department and its staff, facilities and practices/protocols.
 - Report to the legislature the findings of that assessment and develop a 10-year strategic plan based on its findings, including policy and funding recommendations.
 - This legislation stems from the work of the Women's Justice Institute in Illinois and their presentations given at the Justice Re-Investment Summit held last month:
 - <https://www.oregon.gov/cjc/summit/Summit%20Media/StartedWithWomeninMind.pdf>
 - <https://www.oregon.gov/cjc/summit/Summit%20Media/FrontlineInterventionswithWomen.pdf>

Key pieces of information regarding this legislation:

- A lack of gender responsive practices is having a direct impact on mass incarceration, and is perpetuating cycles of trauma, victimization and harm among impacted families and communities.
- A powerful body of literature reveals important differences in the reasons underlying men and women's criminal involvement. It demonstrates that the justice pathways of women and girls are disproportionately impacted by sexual violence, domestic abuse, and related trauma, mental illness and poverty.

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At the same time, gender responsive interventions have been proven to achieve de-carceration, improved safety and more positive outcomes for women.

- Why the focus on incarcerated mothers via the Center?
 - 84% of incarcerated mothers had at least 1 child living with them before incarceration and are more likely than men to serve as the custodial parent of their children.
 - Children of incarcerated mothers are 2.5 times more likely to also become incarcerated in their lifetime than if their father is incarcerated. They are also at much greater risk of dropping out of school and academic challenges.
 - Having a parent in prison can have an impact on a child's mental health, social behavior, and educational prospects.
 - Over half of incarcerated mothers do not see their children during their incarceration
 - Research shows that for incarcerated mothers, family connections are best indicator of successful re-entry.

This concept will be articulated in the -1 amendment to HB 3300, replacing the base bill.

We look forward to sharing more about this legislation with you tomorrow and hope you will support HB 3300-1. Thank you!

Sincerely ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Susan Stoltenberg". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Susan" being particularly prominent.

Susan Stoltenberg
CEO, YWCA of Greater Portland