

PERSONAL TESTIMONY - INDIVIDUAL WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

Date: April 23, 2019

To: The Honorable Jennifer Williamson, Chair; The Honorable Sherrie Sprenger and Chris Gorsek, Vice-Chairs; Members of the House Judiciary Committee

From: Trevor Walraven

Re: Sharing support for youth justice reform through **SB 1008**

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and members of Senate Judiciary Committee:

I would like to first say thank you. To each of you, for your service and for the opportunity to share my support in changing how we treat youth in our criminal justice system. I would also like to acknowledge the tremendous harms that I committed when I was 14 years old which led to my waiver into adult court and subsequent conviction for Aggravated Murder. I can never restore the harms of my youth and will forever regret the terrible choices that I made in killing an innocent man. I received a sentence of life in prison for my actions and as a waived youth offender ultimately gained release through Oregon's Second Look statute however many of our youth are not afforded such an opportunity and it is from this point of advocacy that I lend my experience. Beyond that I want to ensure that there is a clear understanding that I was, in many ways, raised by a population of individuals who committed similar harms from the age of 14 through nearly 32. I spend almost 18 years in 9 different facilities, both county and state, youth and adult. Thus this community of individuals who we are talking about changing things for currently exist and are part of who I represent in coming forward.

By passing SB 1008, youth convicted of Measure 11 sentences would be eligible for a Second Look halfway through their terms of confinement. I believe that this is a beneficial practice for a number of reasons. Speaking both personally and from lived experience, youth grow up and are very different people as time passes. Oregon Youth Authority has a tremendous amount of services and even culture that recognizes that youth are different, need structure and additionally they need support as they develop into their adult selves. We here in Oregon are among I believe only 3 states that can maintain a youth offender in the youth system until they are 25 which provides a greater amount of time to ensure that those releasing can do so in such a way as to reintegrate into society as productive citizens. We also know that statistically, those who remain in the youth system, as opposed to being tried, convicted and / or confined in the adult system have a reduced likelihood of recidivating. In the interest of public safety I think it is important to provide our youth with opportunities to release under the best possible conditions and that means evaluating who they are as they develop which is precisely what a Second Look opportunity provides.

Part of that OYA culture is what solidified for me the values of giving back, mentoring others and continued engagement in education. The staff in youth facilities are far more geared towards the recognition of youth needing to habilitate as they continue to grow since they are not yet fully formed individuals. This is slightly different than the need to rehabilitate which we are most often drawn towards however you only rehabilitate something that has already been fully developed and since we know through brain science that kids' brains do not fully form until an average of 25 years of age, what we are doing to help youth develop remains in the habilitation stage. As part of OYA's recognition, their highest levels of achievement are BLASERS which stands for Bold Leaders Achieving Safe Everlasting Return to Society.

We know that around 95 percent of those in our criminal justice system will at some point be returning to society. Oregon should proudly recognize that we have the tools to help youth develop into productive members of our communities and if we can not offer the tools for success and the moral foundation from which to move forward than we can not be in the "correctional" business. I think it is important to recognize as well that when Measure 11 was voted into law in 1995 we also created OYA and changed the years of confinement in youth facilities up to age 25. We now have nearly 25 years of data on what that different system of operation looks like and know with statistical certainty that we are better off treating youth as youth.

I do want to acknowledge that it took over a decade for me to accept responsibility for my actions at 14 years old. Part of what I have learned over the years is that it takes a different set of circumstances or amount of time for each person to move in the right direction. It was no one thing that shifted me towards a different trajectory and while there are certainly best practices for us to follow which will likely result in the outcomes we seek, there are no cookie cutter responses which is part of why I so firmly believe in treating youth accordingly. Providing our youth with an opportunity to show who they are however many years after what is oftentimes the worst decision they will ever make is important work for us to engage.

These same thoughts reflect the support that I have for SB 1008. Some of the individuals who are serving true life without the possibility of parole are those who helped me become the now productive member of society that I am. Those automatically waived to adult court and serving Measure 11 sentences are some of who propelled me to success both inside and outside of prison. I was asked to speak at OYA's quarterly managers meeting 8 days after my initial release in February of 2016 which I did and went from there over to Hillcrest where I had the privilege of talking to some of the youth who were serving lengthy Measure 11 and Aggravated Murder sentences. I talked to them about the transition from youth to adult facilities, the difference in culture and the advantages of being in OYA, encouraging pro-social activities while they were more available. Not long thereafter I was asked to speak at the University of Oregon to a restorative justice class and subsequent to that I have given roughly 100 presentations to audiences of all backgrounds. I purchased my first home last week and I am engaged to be married next year. I work full time, pay my taxes and volunteer my time in the ways that I believe are mutually beneficial to the community I came from and the one I now am part of.

Today I am someone who seeks out responsibility and weighs the harms I committed everyday. I find myself regularly advocating for greater resource availability for those negatively impacted by crime. I am the only Oregon youth offender to receive two Second Looks due to complicated litigation issues though at both and by different judges I was found to be the poster child for second look. As such I urge you to provide others the same opportunities that I was provided as I believe that our society can and should do better than we currently are – and I believe that those who make the horrible decisions early on in their lives are some of the same individuals who can and will help us create safer and better futures for everyone so long as they are given the chance.

As I am sure you have heard from many others, these are issues of great importance. I was born and raised in Oregon so this is my home and I want safe communities just as much as the next person if not more based on what I know about our criminal justice system. The fact that my choices left more than half of my life lived thus far to be spent in correctional facilities is of my own doing however it also lends an experiential expertise on this subject in particular. Please understand that your decisions impact lives, children's lives, and that we can and should do better. Lastly I will pass along one of the many quotes that moved me in a different way. Once you know, you owe.

Thank you for your time and consideration of Oregonians.

[Trevor Walraven – Springfield]