



AFSCME Corrections and Public Defenders Urge Your "Yes" Vote on SB 1008

From the desk of
Karin Power


Dear Representatives of the Oregon House,

As you know, Oregon AFSCME Council 75 represents members in public safety including Corrections Officers at the Department of Corrections and in county jails around the state, at the Oregon Youth Authority and in public defense. We are writing to ask for you to pass SB 1008, an important bill for appropriately trying youth accused of crimes and for providing opportunities to have a second look at their time served as they age out of the Oregon Youth Authority and into the Department of Corrections.

As people who have worked with these youth, we know first-hand that a majority of them, when given the opportunities, support and guidance, have the capacity to grow and become productive members of our communities. When released, they are less likely to reoffend with this support. Ensuring that youth accused of crimes aren't automatically waived into adult court, and being allowed a hearing with a judge to decide whether or not they should be tried as an adult is the first step in providing these opportunities and the hope they need to begin a path of rehabilitation. The science is with us on this, we know that brain development isn't complete in the teen years and when coupled with generational trauma and abuse, it can make for a confused and volatile juvenile. Treating them as adults and putting them into the adult correctional system only creates institutionalized and more criminal adults. When we put youth in a setting that is supportive and helps them build skills, helps them heal and gives them hope these kids can grow to become adults who give back to their communities.

We also know that providing opportunities for those convicted when they are teenagers to have a second look at their sentences or a hearing as they age out of the Oregon Youth Authority are steps critical to giving them a goal and hope. These are necessary not only from a perspective of treating people compassionately and humanely but is also necessary for keeping themselves, their fellow inmates, and those who work with them safer. When there is nothing to work toward, and only an environment of despair, a person is more likely to fall back on violence they have learned and see as necessary to survive in the incredibly difficult corrections environment. The provisions and opportunities in SB 1008 are the antidote to that despair, by providing a path to something more positive and productive.

The bottom line is that most of these kids who are growing up in custody will eventually be released into our communities. SB 1008 is not a guarantee of earlier release but an opportunity to ensure that a convicted youth's time in custody gets them ready to join the community, by first giving them the benefit that we believe they can become good, productive citizens, and the hope that they can achieve that status to be released and put those skills to use.

Please pass SB 1008.

In Solidarity,

The members of the AFSCME Conservative Caucus and Presidents of the AFSCME represented public defender locals.

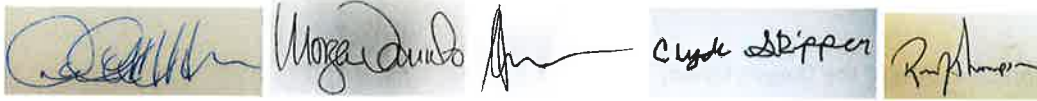
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