

To: House Committee on Judiciary

From: Dr. Barbara Ramirez Spencer

Re: HB 4131

Chair Sanchez, Vice Chairs Bynum and Sprenger, and Members of the Committee

I am Dr. Barbara Ramirez Spencer, a YWCA of Greater Portland board member and former chair of the Oregon Commission for Women. I write in support of HB 4131 which creates the Family Preservation Project in statute and provides funding through 2027.

YWCA of Greater Portland recognizes that incarcerated mothers and their children are a critical component within the criminal justice system. In Oregon, eighty-four percent of female inmates had at least one child living with them before incarceration. There is evidence that the systemic impacts of maternal incarceration on the children of female inmates are devastating, with children facing long and short term social, economic, health, academic and psychological barriers to their success. In fact, one of the strongest risk factors for juvenile delinquency is a parental history of criminality. For incarcerated mothers, imprisonment, compounded by separation from children, is particularly damaging.

I endorse the successful work by the YWCA of Greater Portland to promote systematic change to help reduce the collateral damage of parental incarceration on children, families and the community. The Family Preservation Project (FPP), supported by state, county and community leaders, has a proven model of three levels of services for parenting programs and other wrap-around services for the incarcerated women, their children, and other providers of familial support. The FPP program has successful results in reducing recidivism for the women, promoting positive parenting between mother and children, reducing the number of children placed in foster care, and increasing successful academic, social, behavioral and emotional outcomes for children.

I am a strong supporter of the YWCA's Family Preservation Project and have visited with incarcerated women at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility to hear the stories of mothers and to witness FPP program services first-hand. My assessment is that the Family Preservation Project under the leadership of the YWCA of Greater Portland provides an evidenced-based solution to address the social, educational and mental health consequences of incarceration for mothers and families. This legislation endorses the program model and provides important partners, such as the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission and Department of Human Services, to collaborate on program oversight and expanded services.

HB 4131 is critical for Oregon's justice-involved women and their families. I urge an Aye vote on this important legislation.