

February 5, 2020

Rep. Tawna Sanchez, Chair  
House Committee on Judiciary  
Oregon Legislature

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

My name is Ashley Dorety. I am writing you today to ask for your support of HB 4131, which creates in statute and funds the Family Preservation Project (FPP). FPP is a program at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility for incarcerated women, their children and their caregivers. The program has impacted the lives of thousands of Oregon mothers and children, providing services to help incarcerated women overcome cycles of poverty, trauma, and intergenerational involvement in the criminal justice system. Sufficient, stable funding will ensure these families get the support they need.

In February 2011, when I became incarcerated for a DUI accident I was at fault for, I knew I had to take accountability for my actions and going to prison was the result. I got sentenced to 60 months and at that point I had never spent more than 1 night away from my 2 year old daughter. This was a very traumatic experience for everyone involved and many lives were all turned upside down. Because DHS got involved, my incarceration only made it easier for DHS to move to terminate my parental rights.

Then I found Jessica Katz and learned about the Family Preservation Project. When I started communicating with the ladies in this program, I was given a sliver of hope that my rights may not be taken away from me. I was working with Jessica and FPP for a couple months and they helped me make phone calls for my DHS case. Not long after I was able to join the intensive FPP program. Not only did having the guidance of FPP help me navigate the DHS system, but by joining the program I was able to have special therapeutic visits with my child at Coffee Creek.

Within 6 months of me joining the program, DHS went from a plan to terminate my parental rights to agreeing to a durable guardianship with some family. Having women to stand next to me while I fought for my right to be my own daughters mother was something I never thought I would need, but I am ever so grateful for all that this program has done for me, my family and so many other families that it has touched.

If it wasn't for this program, I'm almost certain my rights would have been terminated because any kind of communication between the systems of DOC and DHS does not run smoothly, or happen at all, unless an inmate has access to emails and

phones (that don't require pin numbers). That was the major amazing outcome of me joining FPP, but there was so much more.

I was able to have special, meaningful and wonderful twice monthly visits where my 3 year old and I could cuddle, read, and even cry together if we needed. Having the guidance from educated women in parenting skills helped me to become a mother again, and gain confidence that I AM a good mom! This program built me back up to become whole again, I entered Coffee Creek broken into a million pieces. Prison DID NOT SAVE ME!! FPP did!! And for this, I will continue to fight for this amazing and life changing program all the way to the end. I have been out of Coffee Creek now for 5 years, and I have been out here fighting for the rights of the children in our country who are impacted by incarceration! Families need this program!

Today I am a full time student at PSU, working towards a degree in Child, Family, Youth Studies. I will continue on to get my master in social work and keep fighting for programs that support families impacted by incarceration. My daughter Sophia is now 11 years old and a firecracker of an amazing young lady. She is an advocate herself and has spoken at multiple functions helping speak out on the ways children are being damaged by our criminal justice system. I am so incredibly proud of the young lady she is and of the close, special bond that we have. I am certain if it wasn't for FPP, our relations would at least be more strained.

This program is critical for Oregon, because FPP helps mothers take ownership of their lives and responsibility for their children upon re-entry. It is a proven model for reducing recidivism, strengthening families and our communities as well.

Please support HB 4131 and help make sure this program can continue.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Ashley Dorety