



Oregon Voices
PO Box 13175
Salem, OR 97302

April 2, 2021

TO: Senate Judiciary Committee
RE: SB 191

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and members of the committee:

I am writing on behalf of Oregon Voices to register our support for SB 191. While we believe that SB 191 is a good idea for Measure 11 persons of all ages, I wish to address particularly how it affects young people. In the last decade that our organization has been in existence, we have heard one story over and over and over again. It is the story of a young person (typically a male, but once in while a female) who has been arrested for a sexual offense that carries a Measure 11 sentence. In the great majority of these cases, the young person has never been in trouble with the law before. In many cases, the event for which they were arrested happened before they turned 18. In other cases, they were between the age of 18 the early 20's.

Although most of these young people realized that the behavior they had engaged in was wrong on some level, few had any understanding that what they were doing was against the law, let alone that society had placed such strong sanctions on it. Sometimes their behavior clearly victimized other persons whether they fully understood that or not at the time. Sometimes, they understood their behavior as consensual. But as wrong as their behavior may have been, typically it was the result of bad choices driven by youthful ignorance and irresponsibility.

When they realize the consequences of what they have done, these young people typically do a lot of growing up quickly. Mostly they do well inside. They take responsibilities seriously. They embrace opportunities to improve themselves, and they do the things that would earn good time for young persons with convictions for other crimes. (This is equally true for older persons serving Measure 11 sentences.) And although they make up a large percentage of those serving Measure 11 sentences, persons with sex offenses at any age carry the lowest risk of repeating their crime.

Because young people are largely ignorant of Oregon's sex offense laws, the current practice of incarcerating them for a long period of time does next to nothing to reduce the incidence of these crimes. A much less expensive and far more effective way of deterring sexual misbehavior among young persons would be to ensure that our education system included information and warnings to young persons about just how seriously the law views certain kinds of sexual behavior.

Oregon Voices strongly supports SB 191. SB 1008 in 2019 was a good first step in addressing some of the problems we have long seen. SB 191 would be another step forward toward more effective use of our prison system and the lives of many Oregonians.

Ken Nolley for Oregon Voices.