

Please vote yes for Oregon Senate Bill 191 (SB 191). In the late 1900's, when Measure 11 mandatory minimum sentencing was voter approved, we were operating under the influence of the "tough on crime" propaganda that had been boiling for decades. In the 27 yrs since that vote and in the 16 yrs since it went into practice, we have been learning about the flaws in all of our systems and practices. More importantly, with the events Oregon has specifically experienced this past year, we have been learning how to acknowledge our mistakes and find areas of opportunity. We have been learning how to make corrections when we are called to do better. SB 191 is a call to do better. It is a correction to Measure 11 which was a choice that was made in another era, a choice that reflects an outdated understanding of the issues.

There are numerous scholarly backed reasons to support SB 191. Earning reduced time encourages people to engage in programs and trainings that promote stability and success, reducing recidivism and improving other outcomes related to post release. Reduced time can have a positive impact on staff, improving workplace safety and increasing job satisfaction because AICs have incentives to be amenable. There are countless studies that show prisons are overcrowded and underfunded. SB 191 would offer some relief to those fiscal and other issues Oregon is currently facing.

In Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Michel Foucault said, "Prison is hell for the majority, but salvation for the few." This is another reason to support SB 191. In 2020, a lot of us got to experience what it was like to have all aspects of our lives greatly restricted or simply prohibited. Every day people demanded to know when we could return to normal, go to our jobs, engage in fun activities, see and touch our loved ones. We experienced the very real negative impact separation from activities of daily living has on our overall functioning and sense of well-being.

We experienced the despair and witnessed the consequences when we were told it could be years more of restrictions. We collectively could not bear quarantine in our own homes any longer. We then felt the glimmers of hope when we were told that if we follow guidelines it would be over sooner than later. We educated ourselves and implemented new behaviors so we could experience the joy of regaining access to the simplest of things. Through our efforts and sooner than anticipated, we are starting to experience normal again. Collectively we are taking a sigh of relief. SB 191 is another kind of sigh of relief.

A vote for SB 191 extends the offer of hope and normalcy sooner than later to more of us. It relieves some financial burdens allowing for more opportunity. Passing SB 191 shows that we have learned from our experiences, we acknowledge our history, and we are willing and able to move towards doing better. SB 191 is an update to our ever-evolving understanding of how best to address the needs of our community and all of our citizens. SB 191 reflects the Oregon of today and is preparation for our better tomorrow.