

April 1, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

It is time for change. I am heartened by messages I have been hearing from many that are speaking out about the great need for change in our Criminal Justice system here in Oregon. But if we are going to have a serious discussion about making changes to address the damage done to our system by mandatory minimums, then we must be willing to discuss the thousands of men, women, and families in Oregon that are currently living with the reality of that failed system. There have been statements made by District Attorneys and Judges that recognize that the current system places too much bargaining power in the hands of prosecutors and that as a result, a lot of people are doing time for crimes they haven't committed and serving harsher sentences than real circumstances require. These changes to mandatory minimums need to be retroactive. Senate Bill 191 will bring much needed hope to those that are currently serving sentences and bring families back together.

The Oregon Department of Corrections is already tracking the conduct of every Adult in Custody. Every six months, DOC sends an Earned Time Computation Form to AICs showing the good time they have earned based on their conduct. Unfortunately, all those serving time under Measure 11 sentences are not eligible to actually receive it. Basically, the message they receive is, great job making good choices, doing good things, making positive changes in your life ... but it doesn't mean anything. Those AICs are no different than the AICS that "earn" zero good time and choose not to follow the rules; they both get out after the same amount of time.

If we are truly serious about creating a system that seeks true rehabilitation and reformation over retribution and vindictive punishment, then we need to put practices and procedures in place that will support that. Right now, the message is clear for those sentenced under mandatory sentencing; we are telling them that nothing good they did before and nothing good they do after matters because all they are worth as a person is the one worst mistake of their life. No hope for a better future or life because all anyone will ever see and recognize is the mistake they have made. I wonder how differently we would all behave if we walked around with name tags, but instead of our names, we were identified by the worst mistake we've made. And no matter how much time has passed, how much good we do, how we grow and improve as a person, that is all anyone ever sees and knows about us.

My husband has chosen to use his time to make positive changes for good in his life and to learn and grow. He got a job in Education so he can help others make positive changes in their lives. He finds value knowing he is spending his time doing things that are making a difference. He uses time to study and increase his own learning, reads good books, takes time every day to

talk to me and our children, and he writes weekly letters that contain encouragement, support, advice and love. He has a smile on his face and seeks to uplift those around him, choosing to see good in spite of his circumstances. This has made a positive difference in the lives of other AICs. I know this because their families have expressed and shared these sentiments with me. These are the kind of choices that we want to encourage in all AICs. Offering incentives for positive choices is a simple change with the potential for enormous positive impact. The system is already in place to help those that are currently serving time. People should have the opportunity and encouragement to move beyond negative choices in the past and be seen for who they are now. My kids deserve to have their Dad come home earlier... every year, every month, every minute of every day they live with the reality that he is not here to celebrate the little moments of their lives. We do the best we can with the resources we have, but not having him here is extremely difficult. There are no words to adequately express the effect his absence has and will have on their future. Knowing that there is hope and something to strive for is invaluable. Even an extra day or month or year in the vast sentences many families face, is priceless. Give AICs and their families the opportunity to earn a reduction in their sentence through positive changes and good choices.

Please support SB 191.

Respectfully,
Rachelle Ross