

**Kate Brown**  
Governor



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House Committee on Judiciary  
Testimony in Support of HB 2912  
February 9, 2021

Chair Rep. Bynum, Vice Chair Rep. Noble and Vice Chair Rep. Power, Rep. Dexter, Rep. Helm, Rep. Kropf, Rep. Lewis, Rep. Morgan, Rep. Wallan, and Rep. Wilde:

The Oregon Commission for Women (OCFW), in its role as advocate for all women in Oregon, and the Oregon Commission for Asian and Pacific Islanders (OCAPIA) strongly support HB 2921. This bill extends the pilot with provides targeted legal services for incarcerated women. Slowed by COVID, it has proven itself to be of deep value to those coming to integration into community with the legal complexities in their personal lives more fully addressed on reentry.

Recidivism, the act of returning to prison after serving a sentence, is a common phenomenon among justice-involved women in Oregon. There is a solution. A comprehensive, holistic approach to recidivism rate reduction acknowledges and addresses the many reasons women enter prison in the first place, and the compounding conditions women experience once incarcerated. The complex causes include domestic violence, substance abuse, mental illness, and the lack of familial and social support once incarcerated. HB 2912 provides and will evaluate the outcomes of essential supports for financial, legal, economic, and social services for incarcerated women as they prepare for and experience community reentry.

Failures at the time of reentry have severe economic and social consequences for these women, their families, and the state of Oregon. This modest investment can improve the life of reintegrating women, keep families together and help eliminate the intergenerational cycle of poverty and incarceration that affect so many communities, often disproportionately. For every dollar invested in success at this critical juncture in their lives, the state saves more than ten times as much when failure rates are reduced, including return to prison. For every dollar invested in civil legal assistance to low-income individuals, the state saves between \$3 and \$11. Unfortunately, because of costs, such reentry services, primarily legal in nature, are not available to the majority of incarcerated women upon release. Pro bono legal services are limited. Further, probation and parole requirements rarely address inherent issues women faced prior to sentencing.

House Bill 2912 extends the sunset to allow the pilot program, slowed by COVID and working remotely, to complete its trial period. It has already shown great promise leading ultimately to reduce recidivism rates by adding three Oregon Justice Resource Center attorneys to provide civil legal services for incarcerated women that will aid them once released from prison, regardless of their location in the state. The Oregon Justice Resource Center has had a long history of providing civil legal services to women in Oregon Department of Corrections' Coffee Creek Correctional Facility. The pilot, which provides legal services such as child custody, debt management, foreclosure, housing discrimination, and employment assistance, is showing itself to be an effective model that Oregon will benefit from its fully completed pilot.

Thank you for the opportunity to support this bill, focused on healing women, restoring communities, and recidivism reduction in Oregon through extending the sunset period. Along with the large number of Oregonian organizations, ranging from non-profits and churches to businesses that supported its 2019 bill, we ask your positive consideration for HB2912.

Sincerely,

Maura Kelly, Acting Chair

**ORCommissionforWomen**

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