

February 9, 2021

The Honorable Janelle Bynum, Chair
The Honorable Ron Noble, Vice-Chair
The Honorable Karin Power, Vice-Chair
House Committee on Judiciary

Re: **Support for HB 2912**

Dear Chair Bynum and Members of the Committee,

I support HB 2912.

My name is Kristina Wells-Fowler. I live in Amity, Oregon and I am a stay-at-home Mom to three amazing children. In 2019 I was incarcerated at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility and I was one of the first clients to receive legal assistance from the Re*Membering Legal Services Program.

When I first met with the attorneys from the program, I was about a month away from release and I was very nervous about several legal issues. My Social Security disability payments were suspended during my incarceration, and I had several questions about when I would be eligible to reapply and the process for doing so. I also received extra payments while in prison that I might have mistakenly accepted were it not for the legal advice I received. Thanks to the help I received from my attorney, I was prepared when I got out of prison to get back on Social Security and avoid a situation in which I owed money back to the government.

The Re*Membering Program also helped me with family law issues concerning contact and visitation with my daughters. Before being released from Coffee Creek, I was lost and unsure how to move forward with my family law concerns. At the time I had very little visitation rights which consisted of 8 hrs. supervised visits per week, which were not being met while I was incarcerated. I had tried to argue on my own to enforce my visitation rights, but had been unsuccessful. I felt hopeless, not sure where to turn, and with no proper funding or the ability to hire an attorney from prison. After just one appointment with the attorneys from the Re*Membering Program my fears were put to ease.

My attorney worked with me to explain my parental rights, helped me prepare legal documentation, pointed me to several resources, and showed me the proper way to communicate with my daughters' father. With the help I received before release I felt confident and prepared to address my parental rights immediately after getting out of prison. After my release, my attorney continued to support me and check in with me to see my progress. With the continued proper guidance, communication, support, and countless times going over all the legal documents, I am now co-parenting my children with their father, week on and week off, and working towards regaining joint legal custody.

Without the help I received from this program I feel I would have not been as successful after I released from prison. They spent countless hours with me going over my legal issues, I always felt that my concerns were heard, and I never felt judged about my past. I thank them for the positive changes I have been able to make. I know I would still be lost and unsure how to navigate the legal system alone without their guidance, assurance and knowledge. They have given me an opportunity to become the present and involved Mom that I know my daughters deserve.

In prison, many people get lost in the system and are unsure where to turn—especially when it comes to important legal issues. I believe the Re*Membering Program should continue to receive funding because this program can and will help those in prison become more successful during their incarceration and when reentering society.

I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak in support House Bill 2912. My hope is that the Re*Membering Program can continue to give others the same opportunity as myself and my daughters received. This program will always be a very positive memory for me and will last a lifetime. Knowing that there were people who were there for me at the lowest point in my life was a great feeling, and being able to share this with you in my highest point feels amazing!

I strongly urge you to support HB 2912.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kristina Wells-Fowler