



Testimony in support of SB 207
Senate Committee on Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110
Submitted by Paul Solomon, Executive Director
February 9, 2021

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

I write to you today in support of SB 207, which would appropriate funding to the Office of Corrections Ombudsman, under the Office of the Governor.

Sponsors, Inc., is a national leader in the delivery of Reentry services. We operate 20 buildings on seven sites in Lane County with over 200 units of housing for individuals with criminal histories and ancillary programs. We also offer a broad range of services—case management, employment assistance, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, mental health services and mentoring—that people need in order to be successful upon returning to their community. We do this because we believe that people can and do change, and that interventions at the appropriate time can serve as a catalyst to lasting change.

As such we recognize the need for individuals, while still in custody, to have access to intervention and support services that can assist them in navigating the, often times complex, Corrections system and to investigate issues as they may arise. We regularly hear concerns voiced regarding treatment of adults, lack of response to obvious medical needs, and in the last year, concerns over ignored or inadequate COVID related protocols and protections. Currently, the task of investigating issues of this nature falls to the DOC's Inspector General, which by nature of their employment and involvement in other DOC matters prohibits them from being fully objective in these matters and often with a conflict of interest.

Oregon revised statute 423.400 to 423.450 authorizes the position of Corrections Ombudsmen within the Office of the Governor. However, that position has not been funded in recent years. Under ORS 423.400 the Ombudsman has the ability to enter and inspect prisons without notice, conduct confidential interviews with prisoners and prison staff, recommend improvements and monitor their implementation, access data and records, and help resolve complaints from families, prisoners and correctional officers who are concerned about the welfare of adults in custody.

We request that you pass SB 207 and refer to Ways & Means Committee for consideration of full funding.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Solomon", written over a thin horizontal line.

Paul Solomon, Executive Director