

Support for HB 2912
House Committee on Judiciary
Submitted by Paul Solomon, Executive Director
Feb 8, 2021

Chair Bynum, Vice-Chairs Noble and Power, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Paul Solomon and I am the Executive Director at Sponsors, Inc, based in Eugene. I am also the Chair of Lane County's Local Public Safety Coordinating Council (LPSCC); and serve on the Governor's Racial Justice Council, in addition to many other boards related to public safety.

I am writing today to express Sponsor's support for HB 2912, which reauthorizes funding for Re*Membering, which provides reentry-focused civil legal services to women during incarceration and reduces barriers to a successful return to the community.

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 men and women with criminal histories and ancillary programs. We also offer a broad range of services—parenting classes, 12-step meetings, cognitive-based Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT) and a Mentorship—that women need 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.

Over the past twenty years, the incarceration rate of women in Oregon has tripled. In 2017, Oregon was on the verge of opening another women's prison largely due to excessive sentences for drug and property crimes which disproportionately impact women and people of color. Oregon was able to avoid opening that additional prison through reforms made in House Bill 3078. With that bill Oregon took a big step forward in ensuring that fewer women are finding their way into prison – Oregon now has the opportunity to ensure that women who are currently in prison have access to the resources and services they need in order to ensure a more successful transition back into their communities. The civil legal services that will be provided through HB 2912 will remove yet one more barrier women face for successful re-entry to their communities.

Each incarcerated person may face a wide range of civil legal issues that can impact their transition into the community: child custody and parental right, debt, housing and employment, suspended/revoked driver licenses, real property, property, and other basic human needs. Investing in civil legal services for currently incarcerated people will help reduce the risk of recidivism and increase the chances of stability. Tackling problems before they spiral out of control saves resources later. By passing HB 2912 and making a modest investment now in civil legal assistance during incarceration, Oregon can save taxpayer dollars and improve the health and safety of our families and communities.

I hope you'll join Sponsors, Inc. in your support for HB 2912.