

May 13th, 2021

House Committee on Judiciary

Re: Support for SJR 10

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

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I am writing today to ask for your support of SJR 10. This proposed amendment would remove the antiquated language of slavery from the Oregon Constitution. Currently, Article 1, Section 34 of our State Constitution reads, "There shall be neither slavery, nor involuntary servitude in the State, otherwise than as a punishment for crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted."

This exception clause allows for the constitutional classification of incarcerated individuals as slaves, denying our incarcerated communities dignity and humanity, while perpetuating historic racism. Slavery and involuntary servitude are immoral, without exception.

SJR 10, as introduced, would remove this exception clause from the Oregon Constitution and finally do away with constitutionally permitted slavery in our state. This change in language is an essential step towards amplifying the message that Oregon is committed to being actively anti-racist.

As with the similar exception in the 13th Amendment of the federal constitution, the exception clause is a direct outgrowth of this country's violent history of racial and economic subjugation. Removing the clause is a necessary step toward undoing that legacy and reducing the present harm caused by our criminal legal system. It would also serve to reduce the economic incentive for mass incarceration, as the free labor of incarcerated people could no longer be used either to prop up the maintenance and operation of prisons themselves, or for the production of corporate goods.

It is imperative that Oregon take this proactive step to demand a more just and equitable future, wherein everyone has the rights, resources, and recognition needed to thrive. I urge this Committee to vote yes on SJR 10, as introduced, to ensure that slavery is truly a thing of the past.

In solidarity,

Jojo Donovan