



June 17, 2021

To: House Committee on Rules  
From: Zach Winston, Policy Director

Re: **In Support of SJR 10**

Chair Smith Warner, Vice-Chairs Drazan and Holvey, and Members of the Committee,

The goal of the Oregon Justice Resource Center (OJRC) is to promote civil rights and improve legal representation for communities that have often been underserved in the past: people living in poverty and people of color among them. We work in collaboration with like-minded organizations to maximize our reach to serve underrepresented populations, to train future public interest lawyers, and to educate our community on issues related to civil rights and civil liberties.

The OJRC strongly encourages your **support of SJR 10**, removing the slavery exception from the Oregon Constitution.

In striving for a more just and equitable future, wherein everyone has the rights, resources, and recognition needed to thrive, Oregonians must examine the systems, laws, and language from Oregon's past that continue to disproportionately impact BIPOC communities today. An example of language from Oregon's past can be found in Article 1, Section 34 of the Oregon State Constitution: "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,**" permitting slavery to continue behind bars.<sup>1</sup>

While the slavery exception was drafted over 160 years ago, the impact is still disproportionately felt today by the BIPOC communities. For example, Oregon's current prison population consists of 10% Black Oregonians, 16% Latine/x Oregonians, 3% Native and Indigenous Oregonians, and 69% white Oregonians, despite the population of Oregon consisting of only 2% Black Oregonians, only 1% Native and Indigenous Oregonians, only 12% Latine/x Oregonians, and nearly 78% white Oregonians.<sup>2</sup>

Oregon is already falling behind on this issue, as four states have already removed their slavery exception language. In fact, **Utah, Nebraska, and Colorado passed similar measures with 80.48%, 68.23%, and 66.21% of the vote, respectively.**

Furthermore, eleven states are in the process of removing similar language. Oregon must act now and send a clear message that slavery, in any form and for any reason, is unacceptable and incompatible with Oregon's values.

The slavery exception continues to deny the BIPOC communities their dignity and humanity while allowing the state to profit off their labor. **The OJRC strongly urges the Committee to pass SJR 10, removing the slavery exception from the Oregon Constitution.**

Sincerely,

*Zach Winston*

Zach Winston  
Policy Director

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<sup>1</sup> Section 34 of the US constitution

<sup>2</sup> Oregon Profile: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/OR.html>