

House Democratic Leader Barbara Smith Warner, Chair

Representative Julie Fahey, Member

House Republican Leader Christine Drazan, Vice-Chair

Representative Andrea Salinas, Member

Representative Paul Holvey, Vice-Chair

Representative Jack Zika, Member

Representative Daniel Bonham, Member

Oregon House Committee on Rules

Hilary Mar Lopez Nichols, Health Equity Community Organizer

Thursday, June 17, 2021

## Support for SJR 10

Dear Chair Smith Warner, Vice Chairs Drazan and Holvey, and Member of the House Committee on Rules,

I know that you all care about the health of Oregonians, which is why **I urge you to support SJR 10**. Slavery was and is a horrible wound in our country, and the only way to achieve true healing is to abolish slavery in *all* circumstances.

I serve as the Health Equity Community Organizer at a Federally Qualified Health Center in SE Portland, which means that I work with patient and healthcare leaders to tackle the laws and policies that negatively affect the health of our communities. Repeatedly, I have heard stories of the devastating impacts the criminal justice system has had on people's health, including worsening of mental health conditions, mistreatment in prison because of a disability, and loss of their connection to social supports. The fact that people in prison are subjected to slave labor, predatory fees, and loss of economic opportunity once released has a huge impact on the health of these individuals, and on the health of our communities as a whole.

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. SJR 10 would remove this exception clause from the Oregon Constitution and finally do away with constitutionally permitted slavery in our state. Across the nation, four states have already removed this language, and eleven others are in the process of removing their slavery exception clauses. This change in language is an essential step towards amplifying the message that Oregon is committed to being actively anti-racist.

You have the power to make history. **I urge this Committee to vote yes on SJR 10 and abolish slavery for good.**