



To: Members of the House Committee on Rules

From: State Representative Maxine Dexter, M.D., House District 33

Date: June 18th, 2021

Subject: SJR 10

Chair Smith Warner, Vice-Chairs Drazan and Holvey, and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Dr. Maxine Dexter, State Representative for House District 33, encompassing NW Portland and NE Washington County on the indigenous lands of the Cowlitz, Clackamas, and Grand Ronde.

As a white legislator in particular, I believe it is my duty to be speaking in **strong support** of SJR 10, a resolution to bring forth an Oregon constitutional amendment to the voters to remove the centuries old language permitting slavery and indentured servitude as a form of punishment.

The impacts of slavery in this country and state did not end with the ratification of the 13th Amendment. Rather, the mechanism of exploiting black and brown people shifted from an act of “commerce” to an act of “public safety” through the over policing and disproportionate incarceration of BIPOC communities. A 2015 article in the Atlantic by Whitney Benms titled “American Slavery, Reinvented,” looked at this issue in great detail. Benms writes, “In the shining promise of freedom that was the Thirteenth Amendment, a sharp exception was carved out. Section 1 of the Amendment provides: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, *except as punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted*, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.” Simply put: Incarcerated persons have no constitutional rights in this arena; they can be forced to work as punishment for their crimes.” The state of Oregon has perpetuated, and even capitalized on this whether intentional or not, having built a sub-economy where the existence of adults in custody is commodified. From the Oregon Corrections Enterprises website, “Corrections industries have existed within Oregon’s state corrections system for the past 160 years. For decades, programs in Oregon’s prisons manufactured a wide variety of products for use both within the prison system, as well as in the community. Over time, product lines evolved as corrections industries focused on the manufacture of furniture, metal fabrication, prison

construction, farm and dairy products, and laundry services.” Colleagues, I believe we have created perverse incentives as a state to perpetuate prison labor and mass incarceration and SJR 10 would allow us to address this in a direct, voter-driven way.

Like the citizens of many other states over the past year, Oregonians deserve to have a say on whether to correct the wrongs of the past, deciding whether to keep this language enshrined in our constitution. I believe they will not. Please join me in supporting SJR 10.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maxine Dexter', written in a cursive style.

Representative Maxine Dexter, M.D.

House District 33 (NW Portland and NE Washington County)