

June 18th, 2021
House Committee on Rules
Re: Support for SJR 10

Chair Smith Warner, Vice Chairs Drazan and Holvey, and members of the Committee:

I am writing today to urge 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. While reforming this system is not enough this is a step in the right direction to making this system survivable.

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.

No one should be forced to work without pay in this state or anywhere. It is vital we change that now and with this incredible bill.

We believe 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 Chair Smith Warner to schedule a work session as quickly as possible and I urge the entire Committee to vote yes on SJR 10 to ensure that slavery is truly a thing of the past.

In solidarity,
Aliya