

To: Public Safety Subcommittee Co-chairs - Rep Sollman and Sen Gorsek; and Members - Sen Hansell; Sen Prozanski; Rep Grayber; Rep Kropf; Rep Leif and Rep Stark

From: Sub local 415 of SEIU 503 – Janet Ferris, Vice President; Debbie Shook, Secretary

Re: Support for HB 5039 – OYA Budget

Date: Wednesday, Feb 24, 2021

Please find this letter in support of HB 5039, the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) 2021-2022 budget. As the agency's primary labor partner, SEIU and our members are proud to be participants in OYA's positive, comprehensive culture change, and we support the key agency initiatives of the Youth Reformation System and Positive Human Development (PHD).

SEIU Local 415 represents about 750 or so employees who work at Oregon Youth Authority facilities and offices throughout the state as a critical part of the Juvenile Justice System. We believe in the mission to make our communities safe and Oregon's youth crime free and productive. OYA protects the public by holding youth accountable and providing a safe environment for evidence-based treatment services, education, and reformation.

This allocation continues to allow OYA to retain critical staff, even as the youth population declines, in order to achieve OYA's goal of "Small and Safe Living Units." Not only is allowing OYA to continue to reduce staff to youth ratios over time critical to achieving compliance with the PREA, but it will also allow for more individualized case management, increase safety, and generally align OYA staff ratios with best practices across the country. With the various efforts at consolidation over the last ten years at OYA facilities – with the closures at Hillcrest and Warrenton - we have slimmed down. And at the same time we are all learning more about appropriate staff to youth ratios; smart living spaces and best practices. Modernization – as supported by the Legislature has been effective as well – let's keep going in that direction.

We also applaud that the Governor's Budget also funds OYA's need to upgrade its Juvenile Justice Information System (JJIS), which will replace a 20 year-old system and enable the Agency to better track basic information about juvenile justice trends throughout the state.

However one investment that was not made by the Governor's Budget, but that we encourage the committee to reconsider, is Policy Option Package (POP) 101 from the Agency's Requested Budget. This small package would have given OYA position authority for two permanent Behavioral Health Specialists at MacLaren, in order to avoid using double fills or temporary help. Currently, the ratio of mental health professionals to youth is 1 to 25, which is the minimum staffing level to prevent suicide, and has been in place for over 25 years. Much has changed in the world and in our understanding of the critical role mental health can play in youth development, our practices at OYA should change, too. We hope the committee will consider including this Policy Option Package in HB 5039.

Thank you for your consideration of our perspectives.