

**Simon Fulford, Executive Director of Parrott Creek Child & Family Services**

**Testimony to the Joint Subcommittee On Public Safety in regards to HB 5039**

**February 24, 2021**

Co-Chair Sullman, Co-Chair Gorsek, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for letting me speak before you today.

I was able to listen to much of Director O'Leary and his team's presentation to the committee and fully support their strategy, their priorities, the Oregon Youth Authority's overall goals for the next two years and their requests of the legislature. Oregon has one of the leading state youth correctional systems in the country, one that is innovative, accountable and led by the evidence and academic rigor of desistance theory. I hope that as a legislative body you are proud of the work and achievements of OYA and their community partners.

There is one area where Oregon continues to fail it's population of vulnerable youth – and by extension their families *and* their communities – and that is in our collective investment in adequate and appropriate community services and supports. We should all be ashamed that Oregon ranks 36th for teen suicide rates, 39th for K-12 education achievement AND 47th for child & youth access to mental health treatment and support. 11% of Oregon's children live in poverty and that figure is DOUBLE for our Black and LatinX communities.

The youth that end up in OYA's care are the direct result of these failures in service investment.

While the number of youth being referred to OYA has thankfully and rightfully been declining, the acuity of their needs – as I know Director O'Leary, Deputy Director Daniels and Dr. Lockett pointed out – has been increasing. Significant mental and behavioral health needs, inappropriate sexual behaviors and offences, drug and alcohol addictions and highly challenging, sometimes aggressive, behaviors.

Youth of color and low income communities across the state are disproportionately impacted by this.

Oregon has failed to adequately invest in the creation of a strong, robust, skilled and financially stable array of community-based programs – residential treatment, independent living, skills-training, mentoring and culturally responsive services – to best serve youth who enter the juvenile justice system.

The Oregon Alliance has shared with you the 40%, 60% even 100% annual turnover in staff we have due to a combination of exceptionally hard work and extremely low pay. This wastes millions of dollars per year – tax dollars – on recruitment, training and support of staff. Sadly, this cripples the quality of care we can provide resulting in youth languishing in correctional

facilities when they could transition back to the community or, worse still, leaving a facility only to fail in the community and return to incarceration.

I urge you to allocate funds to invest in the BRS OWI Update Package which updates the Child Welfare rate model to comply with federal guidelines.

I urge you to also incorporate the Sex Offender Treatment rate increase that was previously requested by OYA into the BRS rate model so that OYA can appropriately pay for legislatively mandated services.

I urge you to provide *additional* funds for OYA to invest in new and innovative services in the community so as to meet the increasingly severe and complex needs of youth but youth who *can* be successful if adequately supported.

If New York City can close its notorious Riker's Island Prison, if Connecticut can close its entire Youth Correctional Facility system and invest in a network of secure and non-secure community programs, the least Oregon can do is increase rates and investments in community programs run by our dedicated and passionate nonprofit sector.

Investing adequately in our youth means they can heal their trauma and go on to fulfilling and meaningful lives: as husbands and wives, as parents of happy and healthy children of their own, as successful employees or business owners themselves. As taxpayers who can invest in the next generation so that we don't repeat our mistakes of the past.

Thank you.