

Date: March 2, 2021

Re: Support for HB 2002

Esteemed Chair Bynum and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary:

As a concerned Oregonian, I urge your support for HB 2002, the Justice Reinvestment Act of 2021. Simply putting more people in prison for longer sentences does not keep us safer, and instead creates new challenges. I support the spirit and intent of this bill, to safely reverse the expansion of our prison system and to reinvest in counties for long term public safety.

As a state, we have tried the experiment in mandatory minimum sentences for nearly three decades. We have seen that they have not reduced disparities in sentencing, but have only increased them. Our prison population has ballooned, our correctional institutions filled with people serving long sentences only because of mandatory minimums. This is costly for taxpayers, and even more costly to the families disrupted and separated by excessive prison sentences.

Rep. Khanh Pham, one of the chief sponsors of this bill, notes that HB 2002 will help reduce disparities while still upholding accountability: "HB 2002 modernizes Oregon's mandatory minimums of certain felonies and allows courts to examine each individual as a human in their unique circumstances, rather than a case number, while still following the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission sentencing guidelines." This more holistic approach can allow us to challenge the racism within our legal system, as well as use public dollars more effectively.

Mandatory minimum sentences allow prosecutors a disproportionate power in our legal system, without the balance of a judge weighing in on what sentencing is appropriate for the individual in their particular circumstances. It doesn't have to be this way. Our courts can take crime seriously without being locked into the dictates of mandatory minimums.

I especially appreciate the investments HB 2002 makes in local victim services. I value the input of survivor advocates in calling for amendments to this bill, making clear that survivor voices are critical to the work of justice reform. Together, we can shape laws that advance fairness and security for all Oregonians.

I stand with Partnership for Safety and Justice, Red Lodge Transitions, the Coalition of Communities of Color, and many others in supporting this important work of continually refining and improving our justice system. HB 2002 allows us to reduce prison expansion and reinvest in counties, where public safety starts.

Thank you for your service to the people across this state.

Sincerely,
Rev. Audrey Zunkel deCoursey