

March 2, 2021

Chair Bynum, Vice-Chairs Noble and Power and Members of the Committee:

I, Dr. Barbara Ramirez Spencer, a board member of the YWCA of Greater Portland and an Oregon delegate to Vision 2020, strongly support HB 3096 and its proposed amendments to support a trauma-informed, gender and culturally responsive assessment at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility.

The proportion of women and girls in the incarcerated population has greatly increased over the past decades, making clear the need for justice systems that respond to the needs of women and girls. As Congress and states addresses criminal and juvenile justice reform, the public conversation should include a discussion of 1) why and how the pathways of women and girls into the justice system are different than for men; and 2) the importance of adequate services, safety, and supports to address women's needs.

According to a Vera Institute, justice-involved women and girls are different in the following ways:

- Most women and girls are incarcerated for non-violent crimes, including drug or property offenses. Most of them have a history of sexual abuse or other trauma.
- One study found that 45% of justice-involved girls had 5 or more Adverse Childhood Experiences, compared to 28% of justice-involved boys.
- Women in state prison are more likely to have minor children than incarcerated men, and they are more likely to be the primary caregiver prior to incarceration.
- Most women have experienced poverty, under-employment and employment instability.

Recognizing the different pathways of women and girls to justice-system involvement, many corrections officials at the local, state, and federal levels have responded by adapting their approach. However, because this issue is not always visible to policymakers, the availability of gender-responsive programs and policies, and related funding for those programs vary widely.

House Bill 3096 would direct the Oregon Department of Corrections to study issues specific to women in custody and report back to the Legislature by December 31, 2021. This study would establish a much-needed review of the specific needs and requirements for Oregon women in custody and provide a gender-responsive baseline for strategic planning and policy recommendations.

I strongly urge an Aye vote on HB 3096 and its proposed amendments.

Barbara Ramirez Spencer, Ed.D