



February 1, 2022

To: Chair Bynum, Vice Chairs Ron Noble and Karin Power, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the American Association of University Women of Oregon (AAUW of OR), we express our strong support for House Bill 4146.

The needs of women in a correctional setting pose unique challenges for operational practices that were likely designed without their gender differences in mind. The problem becomes even more complicated when race is part of the picture.

Importantly, in the United States the majority of incarcerated females are parents to children under the age of 18. Unlike most men who commit crimes, many of these incarcerated mothers have sole custody of their children and plan to resume their parenting role following release.<sup>1</sup>

Women who commit crimes are also more likely to suffer from co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders, which place them in a group at the highest risk for recidivism and relapse and thus most in need of treatment.<sup>2</sup> They are also more likely to have experienced trauma and abuse.

While the number of women entering prisons and jails has grown significantly, this increase has not been met with commensurate correctional practices, standards and programming. Research has demonstrated that gender-neutral approaches -- if evidence based -- can be effective in reducing recidivism for both men and women, but it has also shown that gender-responsive approaches result in far better outcomes for women.<sup>3</sup>

HB 4146 also authorizes the creation of a Gender-Responsive Advisory Council which is directed to conduct listening sessions concerning the experiences of women and families in the criminal justice system, and to make recommendations to the legislature about policy recommendations. We applaud this portion of the bill. Listening first is critical to effective legislating. Even more important is listening to those directly impacted by proposed legislation before it is introduced.

We urge the passage of House Bill 4146.

Respectfully Submitted,

Trish Garner  
*State Public Policy Chair, American Association of University Women*  
garner37@mac.com

---

<sup>1</sup> "Female Reentry and Gender - Responsive Programming," National Institute of Justice, <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/female-reentry-and-gender-responsive-programming>.

<sup>2</sup> Above Report.

<sup>3</sup> "Adopting a Gender-Responsive Approach for Women in the Justice System: A Resource Guide," Justice Center: The Council of State Governments, <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/female-reentry-and-gender-responsive-programming>