



Oregon Voices
PO Box 13175
Salem, OR 97302

February 20, 2022

RE: HB4120-support
Chair Prozanski, Vice-chair Thatcher and members of the committee

Oregon Voices supports HB4120. We see this as a step toward removing barriers that may prevent certain low-income inmates from exercising their legal right to access the judicial system. Incarcerated people may have an income stream while in prison but the amount they earn is astonishingly low. Any fees that they pay should recognize their greatly reduced income potential. Oregon Voices recognizes that certain fees will reduce the potential for frivolous legal filings. We support the provisions of HB4120 that provide for an analysis of the inmate's financial status before waiving fees.

The Oregon Department of Corrections has moved toward providing protections for inmates against discrimination, illegal punishment, dangerous living situations, and injury. The protections are not perfect. Inmates may use the grievance procedure developed by DOC but the people assessing the grievance are often the people named in the grievance. The judicial system provides an avenue for inmates to have a fair and objective assessment of their complaint. When I was incarcerated, I witnessed another inmate suffering the pain of metastatic colon cancer. His symptoms were attributed to malingering, but through a legal filing he was able to receive appropriate care.

Inmates can engage in gainful employment while incarcerated but as noted above, the amount they receive is very low. I had the highest paying inmate job in DOC while I was incarcerated. The most money I ever received was \$75.00 per month (not per week). A \$250 filing fee would take months to accrue even if I limited monthly expenses to basic hygiene and stationery. The inmate with colon cancer was unable to work due to his symptoms and he could afford to pursue legal recourse only with financial assistance from other inmates.

We recognize that fees for services are necessary; the potential for frivolous legal filings can occur in any situation. Thus we support the development of a fair procedure for evaluating a person's finances before granting a waiver. Oregon Voices wants the judicial system to work quickly and efficiently for everyone without being slowed by unnecessary distractions.

Everyone, including incarcerated people, wants to be treated fairly. Oregon Voices wants to be certain that inmates are not excluded from necessary legal services simply because they are poor. HB4120 acknowledges the need for fees while providing for a fair and equitable waiver of fees in certain situations. Oregon Voices asks for your 'yes' vote on HB4120.

For Oregon Voices,

Scott Strickland