

Chair Dembrow and members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Dr. Deltra Ferguson. I am the Executive Director of Resolve Center for Dispute Resolution and Restorative Justice of southern Oregon. Resolve has been serving the people of Jackson, Josephine and surrounding areas for nearly 33 years. Resolve helps people manage conflict through mediation, repair harm and build community through restorative justice, and advance peace through resolution education and training. Resolve's professional mediators, restorative justice practitioners, and community volunteers are dedicated to building safer, healthier, and more equitable communities at home, at work, and at school.

I am writing with urgency to ask you to support SB600, appropriating \$4,980,000 for Oregon's network of Resolution Centers.

In the ten years that I have served as Executive Director for Resolve of southern Oregon I have observed a steady decline in funding from the State. From the 2011-13 biennium to the current, 2021-2023 biennium, Resolve has averaged just a 2% increase per year in base funding. When adjusted for inflation, a diminishing pattern of base funding emerges. This is one example illustrating how funding for the network of Oregon Resolution Centers has receded over time.

Oregon's Resolution Centers are a mixture of nonprofits and programs within municipalities (city or county). The free-standing nonprofit Centers, most in rural counties, have experienced the greatest sustainability challenge—and several have had to close their doors.

The bare minimum required for a sustainably funded and functional Resolution Center will support an administrator, two practitioners, and case management support. Some of Oregon's smaller Resolution Centers are trying to manage with a single half-time practitioner and a little over \$50,000 per biennium from the State.

By contrast, Washington has a robust and healthy network of resolution centers that complements and partners with their court system, and saves an immense amount of money for that state.

It is no coincidence that, in addition to mediation, the up-stream practice of restorative justice has gained a foothold in Oregon's Resolution Centers. Community resolution and repair is up-stream/money saving work that keeps people out of the courts, keeps youth in school, and keeps justice-involved youth away from adult incarceration

Mediation and restorative justice are trauma informed practices that empower people by supporting them in finding solutions through listening and understanding, and by creating a path to accountability for offenders and greater safety for those impacted by harm. SB 600 will strengthen and sustain and these incredibly valuable community services.

Oregon's Resolution Centers are now being turned to for housing stability mediation; to stave off eviction, avoid foreclosure, and stabilize manufactured dwelling parks. The need for adequate investment in community resolution and repair has probably never been so clearly needed.

Thank you for your thoughtful contemplation of this requested support, and for your leadership.

Deltra Ferguson, PhD
Executive Director, Resolve



Center for Dispute Resolution and Restorative Justice

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In rural southern Oregon we know our neighbors, and we see people we know every time we go shopping, to a school function, or to an evening out on the town. Building and maintaining community is crucial, and tangible for the people who live here.

Mediation is a voluntary, confidential process where people in conflict meet with a mediator in a private and neutral setting to resolve their differences.

Through mediation and restorative justice people find solutions that come from listening, connecting and understanding. The power to find ways to solve problems without turning to a judge, authority, or law to make decisions, has appeal for rural people who feel pride in self-reliance.

Resolution services offer the promise of an upstream solution that is cost effective and complementary to existing avenues for justice. Mediation and restorative justice create a range of responses to settle dispute and repair harm beyond litigation and punitive justice. Greater housing stability, safer schools, functional workplaces, and connected neighborhoods are outcomes of conflict resolution and non-punitive accountability.

Restorative Justice is a practice used to build relationships and strengthen community, and to encourage accountability and repair harm when wrongdoings occur.

Oregon needs to invest in community resolution services. The current level of state funding is not sustainable. With sufficient funding Resolve will be able to hire more professional staff, expand our physical presence to services in Josephine County, support renters, landlords, and property owners through mediation to stabilize housing, bring restorative justice skills to our educators to keep kids in school, work together with justice professionals and courts for accountability and victim needs, and keep people away from systems of incarceration.

Reduce costly litigation, incarceration, and housing instability. Make an investment in community resolution for the people of Oregon.