

10 March 2023

Subj: **Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) Budget Bill 5541**

Co-Chairs Evans, Sollman, and honorable members of the committee:

With the crowded hearings yesterday on the subject item, and aware that I have already spoken with some of you, I elected to pass on making verbal remarks in favor of some brief notes about ‘staying the course’ of the Governor’s budget request as it pertains to OYA.

- **Population downturn and forecast:** We have seen a reduction of our numbers of youth in custody, which is fortunate in terms of being in the midst of OYA’s Ten-Year Plan. We have previously held a staff-to-youth ratio of 3:25, but our evidence-based goal has been to reduce this to 3:16, with the same benefits as smaller classrooms for teachers, for example. We must also maintain the capability of expansion again, since the numbers and demographics of incarcerated populations can vary widely based on any number of factors. It is reasonable to presume that a greater number of mental health cases will present themselves in the near future, if for no other reason than the after-effects of the Lockdown. OYA can absorb the recommendation of closing one unit for the time being, but any further reductions would be eating our seed corn.
- **Personnel recruiting and retention:** Like all walks of life today, this is an acute problem, not only with the line staff who maintain a moment-to-moment presence and guidance with the youth, but most particularly with our therapists (48% staffing shortfall). Outside group homes attempt a therapist-to-youth ratio of 1:4; ours is beyond 1:8. Even without the mental health surge above, it is imperative that we increase our staffing of MH professionals.
- **Fully fund the Jackie Winters Transition Program:** This is the only transition program for female youth in Oregon, situated next to the only facility for females at Oak Creek in Albany. It is self-evident that providing necessary funding is crucial, yet to date OYA has had to staff the program out of hide.
- **Juvenile Justice Information System (JJIS):** I echo the remarks given in testimony. OYA early on pioneered this important system for the state and counties, but that means that it is the oldest in the US and the under-lying software is obsolete.
- **Security systems:** We maintain a sharp focus on safety and security, but the federal Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) impels us to up the ante on our camera systems – more and better, up-to-date cameras, supporting hardware and software, and wiring.

I will continue to seek opportunities to visit with you and others, and to answer whatever questions you may have. Thank you for your time and kind consideration.

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