

Date: March 11, 2023
To: Senate Committee on Judiciary
From: Jacqueline Salzinger
Re: Support both SB 413 and SB 817

Dear Senators of the Committee on Judiciary,

As an Oregonian who works abroad, I often have friends and acquaintances of other nationalities ask me what it's like to be from such a "free" nation. The reality, though, is that due process, presumption of innocence, and the ability to build a normal life despite one's flawed past are elements of freedom that a disturbingly high percentage of Americans do not in fact get to enjoy due to our broken criminal justice system.

This crisis of criminal justice across America affects our state in particular ways, ways that key advocates and observer groups on this issue have called our attention to during the current legislative session. These advocates raise these issues not only because they are vital to the democratic integrity and social fabric of our state but because **today the legislature actually has the opportunity to effectuate a solution to the problems we face.**

For years now, we have let simmer in our state a crisis in public defense. The backlog of cases is so great that only 4% of cases even proceed to trial! Again it is hard for me to describe anything about a society that lets this happen as "free" or "just." **The right to a trial and the right to a public defender are not being met in Oregon today**, nor are we currently equipped to make those things happen in the near future, without reforms. We know, too, that this problem disproportionately impacts Black and brown communities.

This is an unacceptable way for our state to be sending people to prison. As a society we must begin to talk about prison more objectively, i.e., as a life-altering experience that impacts people's well-being not just while they are locked up but potentially for years and years to come. We must treat this topic with more attention and care in our state.

I believe that the coalition that supports this bill put ALL Oregonians' best interests in mind when they identified **the solutions we see before us now in SB 413 and SB 817.** We should note that probation is not the same as being "let off." Judges still have purview under this law to enact whatever decisions they think are best for our state and our communities. Importantly, this bill reduces the need to engage in lengthy trials by allowing people accused of low-level crimes a pathway to take responsibility and work toward dismissal through community service and/or counseling.

I frankly can't imagine anyone claiming that more community service and counseling opportunities *wouldn't* be a good thing for the health of our communities. One thing that we *know* to be unhealthy in our communities now, however, is a justice system unequipped to provide those accused any means of their own defense. That situation directly funnels people into plea bargains and prisons and perpetuates cycles of poverty and prison time that negatively affect the ENTIRE community, not just the individuals accused.

I urge you to heed the testimonies of the many trustworthy and care-driven organizations—with truly remarkable track records on justice issues—that have come out in support of this bill, including but not limited to the ACLU of Oregon, the Urban League of Portland, Oregon AFSCME, Coalitions of Communities of Color, and more.

I furthermore urge you to move this bill forward today and ensure it passes into law during the current session.

Respectfully,
Jacqueline Salzinger
Voter, Oregon House District 33