

Submitter: Scott Smith

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Judiciary

Measure: SB586

SB 586 House Judiciary Committee Hearing 4/13/2023 Scott Smith
Testimony

Chair Kropf, Vice-Chair Andersen, Vice-Chair Wallan, and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of SB 586.

My name is Scott Smith, and I am the Restorative Justice Program Manager at the Center for Dialogue and Resolution, a community-based nonprofit serving Lane County.

Our Center has run a restorative justice program in partnership with the Lane County Circuit Court since 2014. In the last year alone, we have completed over 60 cases from that court. We have also in the last few years worked on cases referred by the University of Oregon, Lane County Parole and Probation, and various K12 schools, as well as cases brought by the involved parties directly.

In all these contexts, we have assisted harmed people, those responsible for the harms, and their communities to create a resolution that centers the needs of those directly involved. We also track the follow-through of responsible parties, to be sure that these processes yield real accountability. All of this is achieved at very low cost compared to a criminal court resolution and sentence, and avoids all the negative ripple effects of a criminal sentence, while giving harmed parties and community members an active voice in shaping the resolution. I get to see these processes work for Lane County, week in and week out.

It has been immensely encouraging to see other programs around the state emerge or expand with the recent addition of some state funding. Restorative justice is offering dignified, practical, and sometimes transformative resolutions to more harmed parties and responsible parties in Oregon than ever before, and the next two years promise more growth. This growth will continue to contribute to greater community strength and safety, as well as reducing the burden on our government systems. If this bill passes, it will especially empower the growth of restorative justice programs that can serve the many victims and survivors who choose not to call law enforcement.

One of the main obstacles preventing even more situations from being handled restoratively in Oregon is our lack of a clear law protecting the confidentiality of the dialogues that are usually the centerpiece of a restorative justice process. I have

worked with people who had experienced a harm and were seeking a restorative justice process, but were denied that opportunity because the responsible person did not feel certain that what they said or wrote in our process could never end up being used against them in court.

I am deeply grateful to this committee for considering this proposed bill, which would fix a key structural gap, and thereby give the investment already being made through the CJC's Restorative Justice Grant program a much better chance to make positive, state-wide impacts.

Thank you very much,
Scott Smith