

Date: 14 April 2023

To: Chair Kropf, Vice-Chair Andersen, Vice-Chair Wallan, and members of the Committee.

From: Liberty Miller

RE: SB586

My name is Liberty Miller. I was born in Josephine County (Grants Pass) and raised in Jackson County (Wimer).

In 1997, my brother was murdered in Wimer. He and the offender were both 21. I was 16. This crime not only caused a profound loss for my family and the small community of Wimer, but it also created a deep, intense fear; a fear that has followed me around the globe all the years of my life.

In 2018, I was asked to share the story of my brother's death with the inmates at Alaska's maximum-security prison. I agreed, with trepidation. However, that experience ignited a passion within me for restorative justice that I didn't know existed.

After two years of volunteering inside, I was asked if I had ever considered returning to Oregon to speak with the man who murdered my brother. At the time, I didn't realize that was an option – no one had ever offered that opportunity. I had only recently learned what restorative justice was and had never heard of facilitated dialogues.

During the winter of 2019-2020, while spending time in my Oregon hometown, I decided I was ready to speak with the offender in my life story. Having no idea how to go about making a facilitated dialogue happen, I simply called the phone number for the Oregon State Penitentiary on the state website. I was connected with Saydyie DeRosia and explained to her what I was hoping to do.

In February of 2020, I found myself walking into the Snake River Correctional Center to participate in a facilitated dialogue with the man who had changed my life so drastically. After two hours with him, I walked out feeling more healed than I had ever felt since the day we lost my brother.

I have since become a loud advocate for restorative justice and forgiveness – something I was able to do because of meeting face-to-face with the man who killed my brother, and something that has supported me in my journey of healing. The offender and I remained in contact via letter since our dialogue. He was released in December of 2022 and has returned to our hometown. I have connected him with reentry professionals to begin the process of deciding what he wants his life to look like as a 46-year-old man returning home after 25 years in prison.

The capacity of my forgiveness has inspired others to forgive as well, including my mother. A mother saying to the man who stole her son's life "I wish success and happiness for you" is the reason I believe that restorative justice, in all its shapes and forms, is not only necessary, but vital.

I also feel it is vital for victims and survivors to know about the restorative justice programs available to them. These initiatives and programs should be common knowledge, not something a victim needs to seek out like a needle in a haystack. If a victim chooses to participate, they should be able to trust that the process will be confidential – to protect them, and to make it possible for the person who hurt them to be honest about what happened – a key component in making these processes transformative and healing.

My hope is that anyone who finds themselves in the kaleidoscope of anguish has every resource imaginable at their fingertips.

Thank you,

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