

Submitter: Viktoria Lo
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

Chair Steiner, Chair Sanchez, and members of the Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Viktoria Lo and I live in Portland, Oregon. I am writing to express my support for continued funding of the Criminal Justice Commission's Restorative Justice Grant Program (RJGP).

I care about Oregon continuing to fund the Restorative Justice Grant Program because there are strong benefits for everyone involved: the survivor, the person responsible for the harm, and the broader community. I believe that the existing system of jail, probation, and prisons as the only options for addressing criminal acts is counter-productive to community safety, restoration of the person who committed the harm so that they do not commit more crimes, and the feelings of safety for survivors of harm. As a survivor of harm and the wife of a person whose mother was killed by a driver, I have experienced these feelings myself: just wanting to make sure that the person who committed the crime get the help they need to never do it again. I do not think that prison as the only option makes survivors feel like their concerns have been addressed, considering that it has been proven over and over again that prison leads to recidivism.

As a resident of Portland, it is important to me that restorative justice continues to be practiced in my community because I feel safer knowing that this option is available to survivors and people who commit harm. As a criminal defense attorney and civil rights attorney myself, I have seen first hand how people can change in the moment of realizing that they committed a great harm. The existing criminal punishment system encourages people to deny their guilt the entire time and never have to come to terms with what their actions mean for their own humanity. The restorative model, on the other hand, starts with the person coming to terms and admitting to the fact that they caused great pain and then working their hardest to redress that harm and pain in order to reform themselves, heal the community, and address the most pressing concerns of the survivor. Forcing the survivor to go testify at trial against the person who harmed them is greater harm to the survivor and deprives of them of feelings of control of the outcome that would make them feel safe.

I hope that the restorative model one day becomes the dominant model. I think people have the misconception of restorative justice that it lets people who commit crimes off the hook easier. I think in reality it has the opposite effect. In fact, people who go through the criminal system often have their cases dismissed based on technicalities or the simple fact that the survivor of crime is too traumatized to come

to court. With the restorative model, the survivor has as much participation and say in the outcome for the case as they want. If the harm that was committed was very great, the outcome for the person who committed the harm will also be very difficult and strenuous – from hundreds of hours of community service in a setting that teaches the person about why their actions were reprehensible, to treatment and training programs that help the person recover from the conditions that led them to commit crimes – these programs can take years to complete and require much more active effort than sitting in prison for the same amount of time.

I strongly believe that the legislature should continue funding the Criminal Justice Commission's Restorative Justice Grant Program.

Sincerely,

Viktoria Lo