

May 3, 2023

Senator Elizabeth Steiner, Co-Chair  
Representative Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair  
Joint Committee on Ways & Means  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez & Members of the Committee,

I am asking for your support of the Family Preservation Project and passage of HB 2731. I am a proud mother of two young people, our future leaders, who are submitting their own written testimony about their experience with the Family Preservation Project and its impact on their lives.

Over a decade ago, I spent 36 months at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility. It was during this time that I was introduced to the Family Preservation Project (FPP). FPP met me at the lowest point in my life and accepted me as is. It was there that I found purpose, connection, and a commitment to make my life worth living. Most importantly for me, I was able to begin repairing relationships with my children and my family long before I left Coffee Creek. This meant when I stepped outside the gate I immediately stepped back into full-time parenting. I made my children's lunches. I drove them to school. I made them dinner. This is not the case for most and would not have been the case for me without FPP. Unfortunately, not enough women and their children are getting this opportunity and without funding FPP, none of them will.

Since my release in 2015, I have been sharing my experience and expertise to (1) pay it forward, and (2) make the path for those to follow a bit less traumatic. Repairing harm and contributing in a positive and healthy way is my "why." I'm sure we can all agree that we want to keep our communities safe, our families whole, and our economy strong. In 2020, I was named the Dignity Ambassador for Oregon and have successfully convened three statewide "Day of Empathy" events in collaboration with the national organization, Dream.org. The National Day of Empathy is a bipartisan platform designed to bring together people with various political views to discuss solutions regarding criminal justice reform. From the event held in Oregon this year to recognize the Day of Empathy, there are three panels that I highly encourage each of you to watch: impacted children, caregivers, and mothers. These discussions will provide you with more information directly from impacted people and the context behind why passing HB 2731 is crucial, highly impactful, and cost-effective. **Please take the time to watch:**

- Children panel - <https://youtu.be/t0tC7EIk12M>
- Caregiver panel - <https://youtu.be/i9lja0a31Po>
- Mom panel - <https://youtu.be/mVMNlp20mOI>

As you can see, FPP is helping incarcerated mothers and their children every day - providing support to impacted families who otherwise do not receive support. Around 68,000 kids in Oregon have had an incarcerated parent. There are no dedicated services for these kids. There is no one to make sure that they get support at school or that they get to the dentist or the doctor. There is no other group or program that works with incarcerated women and their children to address these needs and mitigate the documented impacts of parental incarceration. To date, FPP

has impacted the lives of thousands of Oregon mothers and children, including myself and my children.

Understanding that the state has critical competing demands for funding, why FPP and why HB 2731? Unlike other prison-based programs that focus singularly on recidivism as the measure of success, FPP identifies and intervenes on behalf of children of Incarcerated parents - an otherwise invisible and overlooked population - to address their social determinants of health. FPP has committed to demonstrating these impacts over time, partnering with PSU's Regional Research Institute and Trauma Informed Oregon to create a comprehensive evaluation template. Funds are matched by the YWCA of Greater Portland with private investments and in-kind contributions approximately dollar for dollar, which allows for the provision of family stabilization and comprehensive wrap-around support services for impacted families and children. Program services address multiple cost drivers for the State of Oregon, including the reduction of DHS placements and associated costs.

Lastly, in 2017, Oregon was the first state in the country to pass legislation to create the Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents. By supporting HB 2731 and funding FPP, you are confirming that children and families suffering from the unintended consequences of parental incarceration are important to Oregon's public health.

I ask that you support FPP to make certain that all children with a mom in prison get the same support my children received. Thank you for the opportunity to share my story with you.

With appreciation,

Nova Sweet  
Corvallis, Oregon

*Electronically Submitted*