

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,

As the Founding Director of the Family Preservation Project, I am asking for your support of HB 2731, which would put the Family Preservation Project in statute and secure its ability to continue providing critical supports to incarcerated mothers, their children, and their families.

I am truly appreciative of the decisions you and your colleagues have to make, and I have profound appreciation for all of the legislators that have stood in unwavering support of the program over the biennia, enabling it to get where it is today.

The primary goals of the Family Preservation Project center around safeguarding the well-being of children of incarcerated mothers; children who have committed no wrong-doing, but suffer some of the greatest consequences. FPP focuses intentionally on the impacts of maternal incarceration, because of the very specific outcomes facing these children:

Children of incarcerated mothers suffer greater instability due to the loss of their primary physical caregiver. This results in disrupted home placements, school placements, impacts to learning, and social-emotional growth.

In 2017, FPP was instrumental in helping Oregon to become the first state in the country to put the Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents in statute. The program has leaned into these rights as guiding principles of our work for a decade.

FPP works to actualize these rights by attending to the well-being of children impacted by their mother's incarceration in every aspect of the services we provide – which are not a curriculum or a checklist of items – FPP meets moms and their families where they are along a vast continuum and provides individualized services and supports based on their needs. Through three tiers of service – the Intensive Family Reunification Program, the Family Resource Center, and a Monthly Speakers Series – FPP bridges a critical gap between mothers and their children, and those who provide for their care and support, to ensure that they do not merely survive, but have the same opportunities to thrive as their peers.

If we do this all well, we decrease the likelihood that children enter or remain in the foster care system, or come into direct contact with the carceral system; interrupting the cycle. We are mitigating against the significant risk factors posed to children of incarcerated mothers, and upholding the rights that we promised mattered to us in Oregon.

Our investments, financial and otherwise, in healing and growing relationships between mothers and their children impacted by incarceration, and attending to their well-being now, pay significant

dividends down the road. 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 by having partnered with Portland State's Regional Research Institute and Trauma Informed Oregon to create a comprehensive evaluation template.

Lastly, the Family Preservation Project is a wise investment:

- 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 reduction of DHS placements. Each year, FPP helps dozens of children to either maintain placement with family, or to shorten the amount of time that children remain in care by changing the trajectory of the case from termination of parental rights to "return to parent" plan, saving the state hundreds of thousands of dollars in DHS costs (est. \$30,000/year/child).
- A state investment of \$650,000 leverages approximately that much in private investment and saves that much in DHS costs alone.

The program is eager to be part of state statute, not only does that provide stability to the program and the services it provides, but would help ensure the time needed to conduct a rigorous evaluation that we believe could help inform supports for children of incarcerated parents across the country *AND* it would ensure continued accountability of the program to the Legislature.

I appreciate your consideration and the difficult decisions that are before you and your colleagues, but I believe that the Family Preservation Project serves Oregonians that do not get support elsewhere – children of incarcerated parents – and does so in a way that leverages state dollars with private investment and reduces the need for costly state services.

Please support the Family Preservation Project and HB 2731.

Sincerely,

Jessica Katz
Founding Director
Family Preservation Project

Yes on HB 2731

Preserve the Family Preservation Project, Invest in Oregon's Children



WHAT: The Family Preservation Project (FPP) has impacted the lives of thousands of Oregon mothers and children, providing services to help incarcerated women and their children overcome cycles of poverty, trauma, and intergenerational involvement in the criminal justice system. Sufficient, stable funding will ensure these families get the support they need. Each month, the Family Preservation Project serves approximately 150 women and 375 children. HB 2731 creates the program in statute and provides \$650,000 in funding per biennium through 2031.

WHY: Through no fault of their own, close to 68,000 children in Oregon have suffered enormous consequences due to the incarceration of a parent. **Maintaining family connectivity is the single best predictor of post-incarceration success for women.** If we do not institutionalize a systemic response to safe-guarding these children and supporting these mothers, we continue the revolving door. Approximately 84% of incarcerated women are mothers and the majority of which have two or more children. When one mom is incarcerated and her two children have to be placed in state care, we are investing \$100,000 per year in that one family with negligible outcomes at best. **We can do better.**

THE COST OF DOING NOTHING

There are many associated costs to the state when we do not intervene. Having a parent in prison significantly impacts a child's mental health, social behavior, and educational outcomes. There are no established safety nets to catch this often invisible, but rapidly growing population of children in our state.

Without FPP	With FPP	How We Do It
Female incarceration is on the rise. Housing a woman at Coffee Creek costs over \$40,000 per year with an average sentence of 5.6 years.	Over the last decade, only about 5% of FPP's participants have returned to prison. The current statewide average for women returning to prison is 13-15%.	FPP provides resources and support allowing women to maintain a strong, positive relationship with their children and family, which is the number one predictor of successful re-entry.
Children of incarcerated parents are more likely to be placed in DHS care.	FPP helps dozens of children to maintain placement with family, saving the state hundreds of thousands of dollars in DHS costs (est. \$30,000/year/child).	FPP works to support relative placements and identify safe alternative caregivers when needed.
One study found that just 2 percent of children with an incarcerated mother earn a college degree.	Children of FPP participants have been found to perform well on academic indicators like school attendance and grade-level proficiency.	FPP supports children's education by helping moms to communicate with teachers and administrators, participate in parent-teacher conferences and IEP meetings, and stay involved in their children's academic development.

How does FPP support moms and kids?

FPP has impacted the lives of thousands of Oregon mothers and children, working with women at Coffee Creek from all Oregon counties and mirroring the general population demographically and in their likelihood to recidivate. **Our services and interventions include the Intensive Family Reunification, Family Resource Center and the Speaker Series:**

- Therapeutic visitations
- Individualized transition planning
- Caregiver support
- Bio-psychosocial assessments and interventions
- Weekly psycho-educational and parenting-related classes and structured support groups;
- Juvenile, family law, and civil case management ensuring that mothers can participate meaningfully in legal matters affecting their children.
- Identifying and resolving barriers to contact with children
- Facilitating communication with caregivers and professionals working with the family (DHS, healthcare, educational, etc.) so that mothers can maintain an active and informed role in their children's lives.
- Monthly educational speaker series featuring civic leaders and community partners, often including formerly incarcerated women.
- Pre-release planning and post-release support
- Self-run Alumni Association providing peer support

OHA Covid-19 Health Equity Grant:

In October 2020, FPP was awarded a three-month CARES Act Grant to provide relief to BIPOC families who were impacted by COVID-19. This grant specifically allowed FPP to support children and caregiving families with rental assistance, utility bill, food and household supplies, as well as educational support and technology for impacted children. **We were able to assist 390 adults, 341 children, and 246 households.**

375

video visits between
moms and kids

4,166

phone calls between
450 incarcerated
women and their
children/families

\$10,000

Total cost for
the phone calls and
video chats



68,000

CHILDREN IN OREGON

have had **at least one parent that has been incarcerated**, which is one of the top 10 ACEs (adverse childhood experiences) contributing towards lifelong detrimental effects.



\$40.8 million

Estimated annual healthcare costs to the state as a result of ACEs.

Investing in FPP creates safer communities and relieves the strain on state resources.



84%

INCARCERATED MOMS

had at least one child living with them before incarceration.



Kids with incarcerated parents are

6 times

more likely to become incarcerated themselves. **Children of incarcerated mothers are 2.5 times more likely to also become incarcerated than if their father is incarcerated.**

PARTICIPANT STORY

TM is a mother of three children, and since her release she is parenting full-time two of them, and sharing custody of her third. This was not her first time at Coffee Creek, but as a repeat offender the only new service she participated in during her stay was the Family Preservation Project.

Through her work with FPP she was able to file for joint custody of one child and advocate for the safety of another by reporting her concerns to CPS. With FPP's assistance, she was also in regular communication with her children's educators and mental health providers; and, she worked to establish a payment plan for her student loans so that she could enroll in courses upon her release.

TM is employed full-time and also is a full-time student at the local community college, where she has maintained a near-perfect GPA. She lives with her sister and her children, and built the garden she dreamt of while at CCCF. Her long-term goals include providing geriatric social services, or something else within the social service field.

STAYING CONNECTED

Many women couldn't afford to keep in touch with their children without FPP's support. In FY 2019-2020 alone, we...

- Facilitated 150 calls/emails per month.
- Helped with over 140 pieces of mail per month, over 100 of which were with children.
- 4,214 video/phone minutes with children during April-June 2020.

Example: A mom who makes \$17 per month working as an orderly has children who live in three different homes. To call each child each week it would cost \$8.10, or \$32.40 per month. To send a letter to each child each week it would cost \$2.25 or \$9 per month.



“Without FPP, I would still be in the dark regarding my DHS case and now I have a chance at reunification. I can better communicate with the professionals involved in my case and I know better parenting skills.”

–FPP PARTICIPANT



Children of incarcerated mothers receive **50% fewer visits** than children of incarcerated fathers.

With FPP, children have increased opportunities to meaningfully connect with their incarcerated mothers.

Children receive two therapeutic visits each month and, where physical visits are not possible, an increase in video visits and phone calls. FPP provides breakfast and gas cards for caregivers during visits.

Mothers are able to make two or more facilitated phone calls a week and send unlimited emails to their children at no cost. We also work to resolve technical and systemic barriers between attorney, child welfare, the courts and families.

For more information, Brian Lindstrom's two documentaries give voice to FPP participants and some of their children:

Mothering Inside
Like A Shield



PARTICIPANT STORY

SH is a mother of five children, with three of them living in Oregon. **During her time in FPP she was able to reestablish contact with her two eldest children and build and maintain a relationship even with the limitations she faced due to her incarceration.**

The three siblings now come to every FPP visit and have developed a strong relationship and sibling bond. From the beginning of her work with FPP, SH been an active participant in the intensive mental health services for her children. Through her advocacy and persistence was able to sign-up one child for ICTS services so they can be seen at their school. There are large financial barriers for the children’s caregiver, so SH has assisted by enrolling her children in enrichment activities like day camps, team sports, and equine therapy.

Through FPP, SH communicates consistently with her children’s teachers, and has been able to work on her relationships with her caregivers to provide the best support and transition for her children possible. With FPP’s assistance, she has also participated in medical appointments for her children over the phone and been able to coordinate her family and community coming together to best meet the needs of these children. When SH leaves CCCF she plans to work as an Optometric Assistant while she attends community college.

“The program made a big impression on me because I saw that, for those clients, **FPP was the most effective support service that they accessed during the life of their DHS case.** FPP helped my clients to identify and access existing programs in the prison; and, when relevant programs were not accessible, FPP’s own support groups, counseling, and other offerings could provide parents with a way to address some of those underlying issues, thus allowing them to progress in their cases.”

–CAITLIN MITCHELL, Attorney

SUPPORTED BY

