

Support HB 2233

Testimony from clients of Re*Membering: Legal services for Oregonians incarcerated at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility

Below is testimony from women incarcerated at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCF) who received re-entry focused legal services from the Oregon Justice Resource Center's Re*Membering program.

✧ *While in CCCF, I received civil legal help from the Oregon Justice Resource Center. The services provided by OJRC were to make sure I have a successful re-entry. They assisted me in obtaining my criminal record history to renew my occupational licenses, resolving court fines and fees, securing safe housing, confirming my employment upon release, completing a treatment plan (relapse prevention & healthy relationships), and maintain my family reunification goals. OJRC has been my connection to the community.*

The advocacy provided by OJRC is stellar. They balanced the challenges my case load presented and exceeded my expected result. Due to OJRC persistence and community resources I have a place to live, employment, treatment/relapse prevention plan. That is more than I could ask for is a chance to successfully enter society.

The women in CCCF can benefit from OJRC services because not every county provides legal assistance for low cost. It is very important for women to have advocacy when faced with legal issues so they know their rights.

*I think Re*Membering is important to keep, because without their services and knowledge of the courts, we are forgotten and the cycle of dysfunction continues. The services from OJRC have changed my life in a big way. If I did not have the help they provided, I would have had many challenges to navigate in an unfamiliar system. Thank you so much to OJRC.*

L. R., Re*Membering program client

✧ *Having access to legal assistance has helped me prepare for reentering the community in many ways. I have been able to get answers to questions I didn't even know I had. Through the help of OJRC I have been able to set in place a plan to get my student loans out of default, worked out a plan for paying my back and future child support, and figured out how to get my [driver] license back....including some debt reduction for past tickets against my license. All of these things are important to have a plan for but the most important thing I have gotten help with is reconnecting with my*

*children. I have been working with OJRC for the past year or so and during that time they have assisted me in obtaining a current mailing address for my children, helped me to understand the process of healthy reconnection, and served as support when I was feeling defeated. Sometimes it's easy to feel forgotten or unimportant in here...like you're invisible and you have no voice. At times you feel stuck and haven't a fighting chance. Since [Re*Membering] was passed I feel like I've been given my voice back. I have learned that I can still fight for my children, family and a good life. For us on the inside it's important to know there are people out there who care about us and our progress and who believe we can make a change for ourselves. For me, it has been the staff at OJRC that have encouraged me to not give up. Please consider, when making your decision, that without this help I would be paroling without a clue where to begin....with my debt, with my license, and most important with reestablishing my family. Thank you for your time.*

K. B., Re*Membering program client

✧ This program has helped me more than anything as far as helping me fight for what's most important to me, and my girls are most important. Being the voice for me while incarcerated and directing me in the right ways to go for fighting for custody of my kids. I've been treated like a normal person and not just a sid-number-given "criminal". I can't even express fully in words how appreciative I am of this program and [the OJRC attorney] Sarah. I owe her a lot and highly recommend this organization to anyone who needs help with advice when it comes to legal matters. You've helped me more than anyone Sarah. I have been awarded joint custody of my youngest and am on the path to making sure I have my oldest in my life while incarcerated and, by the grace of god, joint [custody] of her as well, all thanks to you and this organization.

L. G., Re*Membering program client

*✧ The Re*Membering legal services have helped me with several things such as looking into a possible move to be closer to family, helped me understand my situation and my charges, navigate through this Covid time, through some on-going legal issues, help prepare some legal forms and being an advocate/resource to answer continual questions from myself and my family. These legal services have been important to me because I came in here scared to death feeling lost and wanting to give up as I didn't see any hope, my attorney has helped me hold on to some hope, been encouraging and supportive. He makes me feel like he cares and wants to make a difference, he hasn't walked away from me or given up on me, I needed that. I think this program should remain in CCCF because there is no other program like this out there. We need more services and support that supports and encourages the women in here. The staff of Re*Membering are knowledgeable about services or know how to find it. The majority*

of us are broken and don't know where to look or how to access the help we need legally and more AIC's need access to this service. We need a voice. We need access to civil legal services because we don't know how to navigate it, access it and how to defend ourselves.

*My attorney has been the best, during my [criminal] legal proceedings my counsel was very hands off and checked out. Alex with Re*Membering has helped restore my trust in legal counsel, he has always been attentive, supportive, caring and professional in his approach. He went above and beyond my expectations. In a time when I wanted to give up he came into my life and gave me support and hope I needed to help me carry on further. He has been an amazing advocate and I can always count on him when I need him. I couldn't have gotten this far without him. Thank you always for everything you do.*

H. M., Re*Membering program client

✧ The OJRC has been working with me over this past year helping me plan my release, clear my DMV fines, and most importantly get closure to an open criminal case involving my daughter and her abuser. I had been working for over three years trying to get answers to why my daughters abuser was still not charged before the OJRC provided me with an attorney. If it wasn't for their help I would be still making weekly calls, writing endless letters, and trying to contact anyone who could help me get answers. With the help of OJRC both I and my daughter have the closure we needed to move forward and begin the much needed healing. This service has allowed AIC's at CCCF to have a voice outside these walls. To get answers to questions we can't just look up or ask for ourselves. It has allowed us to have equal opportunity as anyone else and give us the freedom to make changes for the better. I surely hope that you will insure their service to AIC's at CCCF will continue and see that it is a benefit not only to us but to public as well.

H. S., Re*Membering program client

Quotes from Re*Membering clients during exit interviews:

- ✧ It gave me a place to come home to – literally. It saved my home. It's a huge benefit to not have to go to transitional housing.*
- ✧ [Re*Membering helped me better prepare for release because] I knew where I stood with legal issues so I wasn't still feeling like I was running or hiding from my past. I believe the legal service helps prevent relapse upon release.*
- ✧ I appreciate you so much. As women, inmates, humans, we constantly feel degraded, dehumanized and unworthy. There were many times when I felt*

almost speechless because you helped me more than I asked for and I didn't feel like I deserved such generosity and kindness. Especially, since I couldn't pay for the services. I am truly amazed by you and OJRC, that you have given so much to me and other women at CCCF, just by supporting us and making us feel cared about. This has been the most heartwarming experience I've had here which is pretty odd considering it's surrounding legal issues. Thanks again!

- ✧ *[A]s incarcerated women, we don't have the resources or ability to do this ourselves. Without this program I would have been lost, and I probably wouldn't have seen my children because of my lack of knowledge. Not only that, it gave me the confidence to do it, to look into things.*
- ✧ *The knowledge, professionalism, support & resources that I was able to get was not only a huge support to me but took the burden & stress off my family & myself. I would not of been able to get through some of these issues w/out the support from [my Re*Membering attorney]. . . . I find Re*Membering important & should be offered to everyone.*
- ✧ *I could not have done these things without you. We have no way to reach out and get information when incarcerated. Being able to resolve issues while incarcerated is a huge benefit – often we've let things go. There's so much to think about when you get out.*
- ✧ *It gives women an opportunity to start fresh. For some of these women, it's really hard to navigate through the court systems—especially when you're a “criminal” and you're afraid of the court systems, it's good to have someone advocating for you.*
- ✧ *Gave me exactly the information I needed, between the “no contact” order, information with my rights concerning my daughter, and helping me get out of CCCF early. Very, very helpful for me and family.*
- ✧ *I want to say thank you for all your help. You gave me confidence and hope that I'm taking with me when I go home tomorrow.*
- ✧ *[Re*Membering helped] Big time, there was a lot of victories. I had no idea that I could do these things. With my evictions, and my driver license [fines], I had no idea I could go back and dispute those things, and I felt really empowered that I was able to. I would have never thought to go and dispute an eviction. How exciting when I got my driver's license! My PO was really impressed with the things that I did. Even like at the release center, when I explained the things we did, they were amazed.*