

YES on HB 2233

Improve the health and safety of Oregon communities by supporting Re*Membering which provides reentry-focused legal services to women during incarceration.

Chief Sponsor: Rep. Sanchez

Re*Membering provides legal assistance to people incarcerated in Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCF) to address legal issues that might become or already are barriers to their successful reentry into the community. It is a program of the Oregon Justice Resource Center (OJRC) established in 2019 through funding authorized by the legislature.

*“[O]ne of the greatest strengths of CCCF’s legal services centers on the support being provided by OJRC [Re*Membering legal services]. OJRC is providing essential, research-based, and nationally significant services to women at CCCF[.]”*

- Gender Informed Practices Assessment Report (2023)

The issue

Almost everyone incarcerated in Oregon will return to our communities one day. Many will cycle through our criminal justice system more than once, caught in a cycle of poverty, marginalization, crime, and incarceration. Our communities pay a high price. New skills and a genuine commitment to change may not be enough for post-prison success due to overwhelming legal, social, and economic barriers.

Many challenges faced by formerly incarcerated people are a result of legal issues unaddressed during or exacerbated by incarceration, as well as more than a thousand Oregon laws and policies that are barriers to full participation in society by those with criminal histories.

Access to legal services is difficult to obtain. Once released, most people cannot afford an attorney. Pro bono attorneys and legal aid cannot meet the demand. Due to the specialized nature of legal work and the breadth of legal issues one person may face, a single attorney in the community generally cannot provide the person enough assistance.

Legal issues facing incarcerated Oregonians



Child custody and parental rights



Debt



Housing and employment



Suspended/revoked driver licenses



Real property



Personal property



Other basic human needs

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“[You] gave me a place to come home to—literally. [You] saved my home. It’s a huge benefit to not have to go to transitional housing.”

Client feedback

Investing in legal services for currently incarcerated people will help reduce the risk of recidivism and increase the chances of stability.

Tackling problems before they spiral out of control saves resources later. Helping people get ready for their return to society just makes sense.

OJRC attorneys have been working with people at CCCF since 2014. Their skills in problem-solving, collaboration, synthesizing information, and communication are a good fit for a range of needs. The OJRC is well-equipped to learn from client experiences, provide quality public and stakeholder education, and help identify reforms to improve reentry.

What does HB 2233 do?

- Authorizes funds for Re*Membering, established in 2019 by the legislature.
- Provides access to legal assistance via OJRC attorneys and support staff who have the experience to understand the unique needs of justice-involved women at a cost of \$1.2M for the biennium.
- Prepares people for a more successful reentry by helping them navigate and resolve legal needs before they leave prison.
- Offers a statewide service, helping people returning to counties throughout Oregon.
- Puts to good use the relatively stable environment people experience in prison to address their problems.

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“Without this program I would have been lost, and I probably wouldn’t have seen my children because of my lack of knowledge.”

Client feedback

Re*Membering has done amazing work since it began meeting with clients in 2019



Annually, we serve about 60–70 women, more than 1/3 identifying as BIPOC, each with 1–9 different legal matters.



We have served women releasing to 20 different counties, with 65–75% releasing to counties outside the metropolitan tri-county (Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas) area.



We have received hundreds of requests for services.

Examples of assistance

- Helped clients avoid foreclosure of their homes.
- Helped a client obtain a modification of her divorce judgment, gain sole custody of her children and terminate her child support obligation. Client wrote to Re*Membering attorney, “I’m living such a good life with my kids. We have our own place and everything all because of you. I think about you a lot for making this life for me. I couldn’t have done it without you.”
- Helped a client establish parenting time with her 6-year-old child, who she had not had contact with for about five years because the father’s child blocked client’s attempts to communicate and learn about her child’s welfare. Client now has a strong relationship with child through regular phone calls, video visits, and in-person visits.
- Helped a client get divorced from an abusive spouse.
- Helped a client eliminate debt to the Oregon Department of Transportation by facilitating payment of the debt by auto insurance company.
- Helped a client expunge evictions, lessening her barriers to secure housing upon release.
- Helped a client re-establish her social security benefits and get a new payee.
- Helped a client get bail money properly returned to her.
- Helped a client address property code violation notices to protect her home from further legal action.
- Helped clients get interstate compact transfers so they could release to other states where they have supportive family members.
- Helped a client with tribal enrollment.
- Helped clients avoid default of their student loans, which will reduce barriers to returning to school after release.
- Helped a client develop a safety plan against possible harassment by an abusive partner after her release.
- Helped clients remit tens of thousands of dollars in court fines and other types of debt.

The bottom line

By making a modest investment now in legal assistance during incarceration, Oregon can save taxpayer dollars and improve the health and safety of our families and communities.

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“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.”

Client feedback