

February 19, 2025

House Judiciary Committee
Re: Public Hearing on HB 2555

Dear House Judiciary Committee Members,

I am testifying today on behalf of the Vera Institute of Justice in full support of House Bill (HB) 2555, currently under consideration by this committee, which would expand and make permanent the successful, cost-effective Family Sentencing Alternative Pilot (FSAP) program. Vera works to end mass incarceration, protect immigrants' rights, ensure dignity for people behind bars, and build safe, thriving communities.

In the United States, more than 2.7 million children have a parent who is incarcerated.¹ In Oregon, alone, nearly 70,000 children have at least one incarcerated parent, a burden that disproportionately impacts children of color and children in poverty.² Having a parent behind bars often means losing crucial financial and emotional support.³ In fact, the Public Health Association considers having an incarcerated parent an adverse childhood experience (ACE), meaning that it can impact the development of children and lead to long-term negative impacts on health and wellbeing.⁴ Oregon has recognized these challenges through initiatives like the 2017 "Bill of Rights" for children of incarcerated parents.⁵

A growing body of research points to the innumerable benefits of keeping families together through community-based alternatives to incarceration (ATI) programs, including diversion programs like FSAP. Moreover, programs like FSAP help build community safety and stability by reducing recidivism and increasing the likelihood of a stable, supportive environment for their children.⁶

Diversion programs like FSAP hold people accountable while providing the necessary care and support for them. Accountability in these programs involves understanding the harm caused, making amends, learning from mistakes, and changing behavior. Diversion programs address the underlying issues that contribute to crime, such as poverty, employment, substance use, and lack of community resources. Research has shown that participating in some diversion programs reduces future convictions by 48 percent within 10 years and improves employment outcomes by 53 percent over the same period.⁷ By preventing future harm and planning for the healthy start for young children, FSAP helps keep both people and communities safer.

FSAP has not only proven effective in keeping families intact and reducing reoffending, but it also saves money on incarceration and foster care costs.⁸ I strongly urge your support for legislation that expands and enhances this vital community-based program. By doing so, we can ensure that more Oregon families remain together, reduce the cycle of incarceration, and promote a safer and more equitable society for all.

Sincerely,

J. Altamirano Marin

Jacqueline Altamirano Marin
Senior Program Associate, Vera Institute of Justice

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- ¹ Pew Charitable Trusts Economic Mobility Project and the Public Safety Performance Project, *Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility* (Washington, DC: Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010), 4, https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2010/collateralcosts1pdf.pdf.
- ² Christopher Zoukis, "Children With Incarcerated Parents Get Bill of Rights in Oregon," October 5, 2017, Criminal Center, <https://federalcriminaldefenseattorney.com/children-with-incarcerated-parents-get-bill-of-rights-in-oregon>.
- ³ Isabel Coronado, "The Resilient Children of Incarcerated Parents: Interviews," Next100, February 10, 2020, <https://thenext100.org/the-resilient-children-of-incarcerated-parents-interviews/>.
- ⁴ "About Adverse Childhood Experiences," U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed January 8, 2025, <https://perma.cc/DCM8-38PN>.
- ⁵ Amanda Waldroupe, "Children of Imprisoned Parents Get Oregon Bill of Rights," Street Roots, September 22, 2017, <http://news.streetroots.org/2017/09/22/children-imprisoned-parents-get-oregon-bill-rights>.
- ⁶ Oregon Department of Corrections and Oregon Department of Human Services (Child Welfare), *Family Sentencing Alternative Pilot Program: Report to the Senate and House Committees on Judiciary* (Salem, Oregon: Oregon Senate and House Committees on Judiciary, 2021), 2, https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/citizen_engagement/Reports/Joint%20Family%20Sentencing%20Alternative%20Pilot%20Project%20Report%201_1_2021.pdf. Additionally, Washington State's Family and Offender Sentencing Alternative program (FOSA) program reported that as of March 2022, only 6 percent of FOSA participants have returned to prison on a new felony after completing the program. See "Parenting Sentencing Alternative" (Department of Corrections Washington State, March 2022), unpublished document, contact jaltamirano@vera.org for more information.
- ⁷ Akhi Johnson and Mustafa Ali-Smith, *Diversion Programs, Explained* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2022), <https://www.vera.org/diversion-programs-explained>.
- ⁸ DOC and DHS, *Family Sentencing Alternative Pilot Program*, 2021, 5-6.