

To: Oregon Senate Judiciary Committee

Date: February 20, 2025

Re: Support for SB 938

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and members of the committee,

My name is Scott Smith, and I am the Director of Restorative Justice at Neighbor to Neighbor, which is a community dispute resolution center serving Marion, Linn, Benton and Yamhill counties. I am also an active member of the Restorative Justice Coalition of Oregon. Thank you very much for the opportunity to share with you today about the Restorative Justice Grant Program.

This program was created by the legislature in 2021, and the CJC was able to make the first grants in 2022, so it is still a young program. I feel honored to share with you today some of the outcomes it is already having throughout the state, which validate the initial investment, and give compelling reasons to continue and strengthen this investment. Seven programs have been receiving funding from the RJGP since 2022, and five of those are new programs that were able to get started only because of this grant program; the other two expanded significantly because of it.

Restorative Justice is a needs-based approach to addressing crimes, and can often meet the needs of victims and communities, for safety, healing, information and resolution, better than an adversarial court process. At the same time, it can meet the responsible person's needs to understand the impacts of their actions, make amends, and take steps to ensure they will not cause similar harms in the future.

Already, these programs are demonstrating results that align with studies in other regions:

- Crime victims who participate in the restorative process overwhelmingly report being satisfied that justice was done and that they would recommend this process to others who have been harmed.
- Failure rates in these diversions are much lower than is typical for other types of diversion or specialty court.
- Precise cost savings to the public are difficult to determine, but it is already certainly in the millions of dollars, and as public partners increase their usage of restorative justice options, the savings will also increase. Please contact me if you'd like a breakdown of how we can figure a ballpark for that savings.
- The programs are not old enough to take a 3-year measure of recidivism, but the CJC's analysts are helping us position our programs to be able to provide that data later, and currently responsible parties are reporting an increase in

factors that correlate with lower recidivism, such as empathy for victims, connection with their community and family, and a sense of plans for the future.

When we speak of strengthening this grant program and its outcomes, we are currently focused on three small modifications, each of which is addressed in SB 938.

- 1) Almost every recipient of this grant program is a small, community-based non-profit that needs some funding stability in order to grow, and to complete the work that their public safety partners are asking them to do. We hope that a designated fund will increase this dependability, by moving towards becoming a part of the CJC's current service level budget. We also welcome an expectation to report regularly to appropriate legislative committees to account for this investment by the state.
- 2) These same non-profits are stretching every dollar and every staff hour, and some functions that benefit these programs are beyond their internal capacity. The Restorative Justice Coalition of Oregon has contributed to the success of these programs so far by, among other things: convening a monthly meeting of the funded programs; providing leadership on data collection and analysis so that the state will be able to draw meaningful

conclusions from these diverse programs; keeping in close communication with the CJC and legislators about the progress and challenges of the programs; and putting on a 2-day workshop for the RJ programs to come together and share promising practices, outcomes, challenges and tools. This bill seeks to allow a coalition like this to apply directly to the CJC for funds instead of keeping the burden of additional administration on the programs, for them to pass along some funds to the coalition. Again, as with the first item, the expected outcome of this section is growth and stability of the direct service programs around the state.

- 3) Lastly, the CJC has offered us some language to clarify in statute the confidentiality practices of the CJC. Our understanding is that this language is aligned with other programs they collect data for, and is more of a language fix than a procedural change. Ken Sanchagrin is on a trip today, but I believe he would be willing and able to explain the finer points of that section later, if you want that.

We have asked your committee staff to make two small amendments. One is to remove the emergency clause. This would allow the current programs to get their next allocation before any rules committee process happens, rather than waiting a few more months into the new biennium. The other amendment is the addition of

four clarifying words that the CJC recommended in the confidentiality section. I don't know if those proposed amendments show up for you yet, but those are our suggestions.

Thank you for your time and attention to this issue. Knowing restorative justice practitioners and programs around the state as I do, I urge passage of SB 938 so that these community-based, healing and cost-effective alternatives can continue and expand.

Scott Smith

Neighbor to Neighbor, Inc

Serving Marion, Linn, Benton and Yamhill counties