

Submitter: Tristen Edwards
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB938

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Tristen Edwards, and I am a public defender. Over the last 2.5 years I have had the privilege of serving as the defense attorney representative for the Restorative Roots Project, a restorative justice program in Multnomah County that takes case referrals from the district attorney's office. The Restorative Roots Project works with both crime survivors and the responsible party to ensure that everyone's basic needs are met and to guide them through a restorative justice process. These processes can have profound impacts on the people involved by addressing the underlying drivers of criminality, encouraging true accountability, and centering the needs of the survivor to ensure they have agency over their own healing. I'd like to share two examples.

Their first case involved a young man who committed a robbery against three people who were working at a fast-food restaurant. The three harmed parties chose to engage in a restorative process in lieu of prosecution. During the 18-month restorative process, the responsible party secured stable housing after a long period of homelessness, he received mental health services, he earned his commercial driver's license, and he landed a stable job. The harmed parties received support in adjacent legal matters, got connected with vocational training, and also received access to therapy. After close to a year of preparation, the four engaged in an eight-hour conference facilitated by the Restorative Roots Project. The harmed parties received answers to their questions about the harm and had an opportunity to explain the impacts of that experience directly to the person who harmed them. The responsible party experienced real active accountability – confronting the harm he caused, being forced to reckon with the impacts of his actions, and, following the conference, taking steps to repair the harm by speaking at his church about his actions and helping to cover medical costs for one harmed party.

The most recent case the Restorative Roots Project completed involved a stolen vehicle. The harmed party did not feel incarceration would meet her needs rather she wanted to know why this had occurred and to understand the person who had committed the crime. The two engaged in a restorative dialogue and the harmed party told me the following: "I came away feeling connected to the young man who stole my car. I got to say what I needed to say, I asked him questions that I needed to ask. Now when I use my van and see the damage from the theft, I feel connected to the story and not to the feelings of fear and violation." During this process, the responsible party revealed that the loss of his mother triggered his descent into using

drugs and led to the theft of the vehicle. The harmed party revealed that she had initially purchased the vehicle in the wake of the death of her own mother. This kind of human connection is one of the many powers of restorative justice. Restorative justice reminds us that we are all connected. It reminds us that there are paths to safety that do not involve incarceration or punishment. Investing in accountability processes that prioritize healing advances public safety both by reducing re-offending and by reducing the traumatic impacts of harm. To date, none of the Restorative Roots Project graduates have committed a new criminal offense. And every harmed party that has completed the process has reported feeling like justice was done.

SB 938 seeks to improve access to these life-changing services. The bill is an important step towards creating more options for survivors of harm. In order for restorative justice to thrive in Oregon, it needs a well-resourced coalition, confidentiality protections for participant data, and stable funding. SB 938 is an important step in achieving these goals and I encourage you to vote yes.