



Steve Gunnels District Attorney

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February 21, 2025

Judiciary Committee
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: Letter of Support for Senate Bill 938

Dear Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Committee Members:

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 938, as restorative justice offers an important approach to enhancing community safety within a prosecutor's office.

In Deschutes County, restorative justice is proving to be an effective tool to reduce recidivism, promote healing for victims, and ensure accountability for offenders. When used in appropriate cases, restorative justice engages the responsible party in meaningful dialogue, requiring them to take accountability and repair the harm they have caused—rather than focusing solely on punishment.

Since 2021, Deschutes County has implemented the Emerging Adult Program (EAP), a pre-charge restorative justice program for individuals aged 18 to 25. What began as a self-funded pilot has expanded through support from the Criminal Justice Commission's Restorative Justice Grant Program, allowing us to strengthen partnerships and serve more participants. Initially assisting eight individuals per year, the program now serves 25 annually. The EAP addresses both misdemeanor and felony cases, and to date, we have enrolled a total of 88 participants, achieved an 81% graduation rate and a 12% recidivism rate.

Many of our participants express genuine remorse for their actions and want to demonstrate that their offense does not define them. Restorative justice provides an opportunity for them to take responsibility, make amends, and through the EAP, avoid the long-term consequences of an arrest record.

Victims of crime also support this process. Many welcome the opportunity to share their experiences directly with the party responsible or through a victim advocate. They value having a voice in shaping accountability plans and often report that their needs are better met through restorative justice than through traditional court proceedings.

Accountability is central to our program. Participants must complete a multi-step accountability plan, meet regularly with a support specialist, and report on their progress every other month to volunteer community facilitators, often requiring more engagement than standard court processes.

Additionally, we support the Restorative Justice Coalition of Oregon (RJCO) being eligible to receive grant funding. RJCO has played a key role in expanding restorative justice efforts across the state by providing

technical training and support for new programs. Their advocacy and expertise have been essential in helping communities develop and sustain these initiatives.

Restorative justice funding enables us to continue demonstrating the benefits of this approach for individuals and the community. For these reasons, I urge your support for Senate Bill 938.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steve Gunnels".

Steve Gunnels
Deschutes County District Attorney