



**PARTNERSHIP FOR
SAFETY & JUSTICE**

Submitted to the Subcommittee on Public Safety

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Testimony on HB 5004

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Co-Chair Broadman, Co-Chair Evans, and members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 5004. Partnership for Safety and Justice (PSJ) advocates for public safety policies that ensure accountability, equity, and healing for people convicted of crime, crime survivors, and the families and communities of both. For over 25 years, our work has promoted community and public safety with policies that keep families together, reduce racial disparities, and invest in communities across Oregon.

My testimony today will highlight programs we support and also provide some important data about incarceration that we want to share with you.

First, the programs we collaborate on and support. Through the Community Corrections Division, the agency oversees the Earned Discharge (EDIS) and Family Sentencing Alternative Program (FSAP). EDIS provides an important incentive for individuals on supervision to earn time off for complying with their conditions. It's a program that has kept communities safe and families together, and community corrections has been a great partner in this work. PSJ has worked with the Department and the Oregon Association of Community Corrections Directors (OACCD) to make changes to these programs over the past few years, and we have appreciated both their partnership with our organization to ensure that individuals on supervision have an incentive to remain with their families and communities.

The Family Sentencing Alternative Program (FSAP) began as a pilot in 2015, and operates in Marion, Multnomah, Washington, Jackson, and Columbia counties to divert parents and guardians from prison. Over the last 10 years, FSAP has reduced recidivism and kept families together. There is a bill this session that will eliminate the sunset placed on this program and make some other adjustments that will further improve this already successful initiative. PSJ has been working closely with the Community Corrections Division, the Oregon Association of Community Corrections Directors, and other stakeholders on both this bill and other similar programs. We want to thank them for being such great partners in improving the lives of those we all care deeply about.

Our organization believes that corrections officers should be well paid, have access to good healthcare, and have meaningful time off. People incarcerated should also have access to

programming that supports them in living healthier lives and being accountable for the harm they have caused. We also believe that we over-incarcerate too many people in the United States and in Oregon. We wanted to share some data both about our incarceration trends and progress towards reducing our corrections footprint over the last decade.

Prior to the pandemic, Oregon ranked right in the middle of the pack in our rate of incarceration - usually falling at about number 26, and 7th in the nation for our incarceration of our Black residents. During the agency budget presentation, the DOC Director acknowledged the overrepresentation of people of color in the system, and we look forward to working with the agency and the Legislature on ways to eliminate these disparities. A significant reduction of the prison population during the pandemic moved us to number 35th in our overall ranking, but according to a recent presentation by Portland State University professor Mark Leymon, our rates are ticking back up to pre-pandemic levels.

During the pandemic, Oregon was able to close two smaller prisons, one at Mill Creek in Salem and Shutter Creek in North Bend. With a lower prison population, these were smart cost saving measures that allowed for investment into needed services. In addition to those two prison closures, the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI), which passed in 2013, prevented the need to build a new prison in Junction City. The creation of JRI was a bill that PSJ and many of our partners, including community corrections stakeholders, helped to pass.

In 2017, realizing that our prison population projections for JRI had not disaggregated data by gender and that Oregon was on track to open a second women's prison, we worked with law enforcement, Senator Jackie Winters and Representative Jennifer Williamson, among others, to pass HB 3078 which expanded earned time for the crimes that are the biggest drivers of the women's prison population. With that bill, Oregon saved the millions it would have cost to open a second prison for women, and the changes in that bill have lowered the prison population overall.

Our organization believes that it is important to invest in solutions that prevent future crime and support crime survivors. At the urging of PSJ and our victim advocate allies, both the JRI bill and HB 3078 invest in victim services as well as community based alternatives to prison.

These bills and others were foundational in setting a trajectory that prioritized local solutions for safety, accountability and healing. We want to work with you and our community partners to keep Oregon on that path. That means continuing reforms, not endlessly creating new crimes, or extending costly prison sentences.

As many of you have probably heard, the US has 5% of the world's population and 25% of the world's prison population - and we are far from the safest. Most European countries and many others have dramatically lower incarceration rates and less violent crime. In that vein, it is worth noting that Massachusetts has the lowest incarceration rate in the nation, yet has a violent crime

rate similar to Oregon. Louisiana has the highest rate of incarceration in the nation and ranks in the top five for its violent crime rate.

As Oregon considers the development of plans to rebuild, tear down, or adapt our current prison system, we would encourage the state to develop a long-term plan that includes our commitment to safety, healing, accountability, and thriving individuals and communities. Such plans should consider and include options for shrinking our system and investing in local solutions that keep communities safe, just like we did with Justice Reinvestment, before expensive prison expansion.

We look forward to future opportunities and conversations as you consider and vote on Oregon's public safety budgets.

Thank you for your consideration.