

Dear senators, legislators, and whoever else may bear influence over this action, I humbly implore you to pass SB1120.

My name is Linus Korbin Norgren. Ten years ago this month, I was wrongfully convicted by a non-unanimous jury and sentenced to ten years in the Oregon Department of Corrections. Prior to my conviction, I was a student on full scholarship attending the Clark Honors College at the University of Oregon. I had spent the year prior to my higher education abroad, in Spain, training with Futbol Club Barcelona. I was recruited by, accepted to, and offered academic scholarships to some of the most prestigious institutions in the United States: Emory, Tulane, Willamette University, Occidental College, Columbia University, and Yale. I was a straight A student, an all-state athlete all four years of high school, all-student body president, a decorated state champion sprinter and record holder in various events across the state of Oregon, captain of the track-and-field, cross-country, and wrestling teams, etc, etc, you name it. I had no history of violence or crime at the time of my arrest and subsequent conviction. I spent a year and a half living under house arrest prior to my conviction, a time where no condition of my release was violated, and no further crimes committed. I only mention these facets of my life prior to being stripped of my greater identity by our prison system because I feel my personality, achievements, and broader personage starkly and uniquely contrast the heinously regressive attitude Oregon has assumed towards its own citizens, regardless of their crime, gender, race, or background.

As a matter of course, all inmates in Oregon transition through Coffee Creek Correctional Institution from their county of conviction. All Oregon inmates are forced to nervously await their fate at Coffee Creek while being processed. And “fate” is the best way to describe it, as while the institution where one is placed weighs considerably over one's wellbeing and their ability to successfully prepare themselves for eventual release, the prisoner ultimately has zero say or influence over where they are sent. This feature of our system is dehumanizing by itself, but how it is carried out is abusive and unnecessarily cruel. Out of all the violence I endured or was witness to throughout my three years of incarceration, “processing” stands out as one of the most traumatizing experiences of my life.

Truly, a long sentence such as mine at 22 years of age, is hard enough to bear for anyone as it is: But the fact that such a young person facing a decade will worry whether they've actually been sentenced to death is a reality this committee should not ignore. Specific doctors, such as Dr. Gulick, "Dr. Death," of Snake River Correctional Institution, have such horrid reputations that their names and actions are circulated back within the relatively encapsulated population of Coffee Creek. Certain institutions have a much greater reputation for violence over others. SRCI is often referred to as "gladiator school," by those in processing for example. On top of all these other concerning realities of being a prisoner in Oregon, are the practical implications of Oregon's geographical vastness. Oregon is amongst the largest states in the United States. If Oregon were a country, it would be the 77th largest nation on the Earth, ahead of the UK, trailing just behind Germany. Being forcibly sent to the other side of the state is like being sent to another country. The drive from Portland to Ontario takes over six hours without stopping. This means visits from family may come once or twice a year for many, and sometimes, not at all, for others. It places an unfair emotional and financial burden on the families of those who are incarcerated.

For these reasons awaiting placement is perhaps the most harrowing, protracted, nerve-wracking experience a prisoner will face throughout their incarceration. So why is it that this pivotal period of extreme stress, which is riddled by anxiety, uncertainty, and grief, is dominated by long periods of isolation and undue deprivation of various freedoms one was guaranteed while in jail awaiting trial, or will be guaranteed throughout the remainder of their sentence? Why are prisoners in

processing legally barred from being visited by their friends, family, and loved ones? It has been found that solitary confinement increases risks of suicide, depression, and anxiety. Solitary confinement is supposed to be a last resort method of disciplining violent offenders. But Coffee Creek processing is quite nearly solitary confinement by default. Out of every 24 hour period, inmates can expect a little over an hour out of their cells, most of which is dedicated to eating their meals. The average time spent at Coffee Creek is supposedly 30 days. But for outliers like myself, it was well over 60 days. For much of that time I was in a single cell, with nobody to talk to, cold, unable to sleep, slowly starving. And when I did share a cell with someone else, it invariably led to conflict: These are people with traumatic histories deeply informed by violence, who are under immense stress. There's very little recourse left for anyone stuck in a cell with someone who becomes unreasonable, aggressive, and violent. Death threats that went into viscerally graphic detail were common. It was only by virtue of luck, and steadfast self-assurance, that I avoided violence while housed at CCCI: I talked four different cellmates down when tensions inevitably broke, on perhaps northwards of a dozen different occasions. And despite eating every scrap I could, I lost over twenty pounds due to a lack of nutrition. Hunger, loneliness, and fear were the only constants at CCCI.

Please pass SB1120, and identify existing routes to make it easier for prisoners to be placed where they will have opportunities to enrich their lives and be closer to their families.

Truthfully,
Linus Korbin Norgren