

21 March 2025

To the Oregon State Legislature:

I am writing to testify on SB 1120, Implementing Gender Informed Practices (GIPA) Recommendations.

Having direct second hand experience with a friend who was incarcerated at Coffee Creek for the past six years, I can attest to the fact that the problems at Coffee Creek are numerous and that the results of the GIPA show clearly that the conditions at this ODOC facility are sub-optimal to say the least. My experience walking this road of support with my loved one was shocking and at times utterly horrifying.

The report is sobering and distressing. I would have to agree that ODOC is an agency in crisis and it is not, with rare exception, supportive of the women who are incarcerated there. The environment is abusive and punitive in nature and lacks any kind of trauma-informed lens. That is needed immediately to stop the harm that is perpetrated on incarcerated women. Through my friend, I experienced Coffee Creek as an oppressive, toxic and dehumanizing environment. I was shocked to hear the stories from my friend of how she and other women were treated.

It is demeaning to be strip searched after having a family visit with your child, who was sitting on your lap. This should be unacceptable.

Any kind of sexual harassment should be unacceptable.

Being celled in because the facility is short-staffed, being put in the SHU/the 'hole'/solitary confinement because you are sick. This should be unacceptable.

ODOC needs to address their issues with short-staffing and high turnover. If it wasn't such a toxic environment, people might be more inclined to stay.

While there are a handful of programs for women, it is highly competitive with not enough openings for women who want to participate. Every single woman at Coffee Creek should have the opportunity to learn new skills and better her life for success in re-entry. This is simply not the case.

I can speak to worsening of mental health struggles, lack of trauma-informed care in all areas, lack of timely medical care, high turnover in medical staff so that consistent care is impossible, communication systems that do not work properly making it difficult and challenging to stay in contact with loved ones, and insufficient heating in the winter and cooling in the summer months during heat waves.

It is time for some serious oversight of Coffee Creek. The GIPA report revealed this quite clearly and now it is time to enforce these report findings and make some serious changes at Coffee Creek and in the DOC system as well whole.

I believe it is possible to have a non-punitive, rehabilitation-focused carceral setting that is humane and encourages growth and change, over punishment and lack of opportunities.

I ask you to support SB 1120 to mandate ODOC to improve its care of incarcerated Oregonians.

Respectfully,
Karina Olch