

Joint Subcommittee on Public Safety

Co-Chairs Broadman and Evans, Members of the Committee,

My name is Annie Britton, and I am writing to express my full support for the passage of HB 5005. Specifically: **POP 090, which would provide \$10M to support the Justice Reinvestment Equity Program**

Based on my own personal experiences, I strongly advocate for Justice Reinvestment and Treatment Courts. Without these programs, individuals like me 12 years ago would likely end up in prison, continuing a cycle of punishment, struggles with substance abuse, employment, housing and issues that come once released without support or addressing the underlying issues.

My story is one that I am deeply proud and grateful to share. As a child and early teen, I thrived. I had dreams of becoming a criminal defense attorney, and I was actively involved in school, athletics, social activities, and student government. Everything seemed to be on track. Looking back now, I can see the early signs of my struggles, but at the time, I never could have imagined the road they would lead me down.

I eventually found myself trapped in the criminal justice system, caught in a revolving door due to my ongoing struggles with substance abuse that escalated over a period of 20 years. Every few years, I was introduced to a new, more potent substance. I felt isolated, angry, sad, and deeply ashamed, watching others—once like me—thriving and succeeding in the dreams we all once shared.

When I was given the opportunity to enter the START Court, a specialty court in Multnomah County, I was in the depths of my struggle. I was using substances daily, which led to my criminal behaviors. My irrational thinking made me believe I didn't need such an intensive program. But as my mind cleared, I began to understand the reality of my struggles and how much help I truly needed. I had become someone I never thought would be—untrustworthy, selfish, self-loathing, and lost. However, with my dedication to change, my goals, and the specialty court model, I slowly allowed myself to grow. I stopped resisting authority and engaged in a program that wanted better for me, even before I was ready to want that for myself. I never imagined that my dreams would come true while being in the criminal justice system, but they did.

I want to be very clear in my support: Oregon cannot punish its way out of crime caused by substance abuse. We cannot continue to place blame on one part of our broken system. Instead, we must collaborate to help individuals build the lives they dream about. We must remember that the system releases individuals every day, why not invest in programs that

allow them to receive the rehabilitation they deserve? These programs not only promote personal transformation but also help families stay together.

I am a proud mother of an amazing son. Thanks to my decision to enter the START program, I was able to avoid prison and remain with my son. Through treatment, restitution, and returning to education, I turned my life around. Specialty courts and programs like MCJRP, STEP, DISP, START, and MH Court in Multnomah County are not just lifesaving; they also save families torn apart by substance abuse, crime, and incarceration.

My sober date is 4/6/2015, and I graduated from START in October 2015. Since then, my life has transformed in countless ways. I have witnessed my son Max's success in many ways, I graduated from PCC and became a substance abuse counselor at VOA. I ended my career there as both a counselor and a court liaison in the START program, a role I dreamed of when I graduated. I am currently working in public defense as part of an integrated team, serving as a case manager. Since entering the START program, I have not committed a crime.

My story is one of redemption, and I hope it can inspire others. I do not say this out of ego but from deep respect for those trying to change within a system that too often fails to see their potential. We need to be a state that understands the reasons behind criminal behavior and recognizes that true public safety comes from rehabilitation, not just punishment.

Communities can be safe if we invest in those who want to be part of them but need support to thrive. We know that the old ways do not help it has built a further divide. We can turn our foundational beliefs to something that allows every Oregonian to change to become the best version of themselves! Let's invest in the community that needs us the most, the communities that struggle with poverty, criminal records, mental health, housing, trauma and substance abuse. Trust me, it is worth it!

Thank you,

Annie Britton