

Dear Co-Chairs Broadman and Evans, and members of the committee,

My name is Zahra Bandukwala and I live in Beaverton, Oregon. I've lived in Oregon my entire life and have had the privilege of working for nearly two years under Tristen Edwards in a restorative justice internship. I am writing in support of the Criminal Justice Commission's Restorative Justice Grant Program and I am asking this committee to allocate \$8 million for the next biennium to this essential program.

Restorative justice keeps our community safe by addressing the underlying causes of criminal behavior, by fostering real accountability for those who have caused harm, and by meaningfully tending to the trauma crime survivors experience.

The CJC's Restorative Justice Grant Program provides critical funds for restorative justice programs across the state that center the needs of crime survivors. It is important that this grant program remains funded and that it has stability in funding by being included in the Criminal Justice Commission's current service level budget.

Investing in restorative justice improves outcomes for everyone involved: harmed parties, responsible parties, and the broader Oregon community. Unlike incarceration, which often perpetuates cycles of recidivism, restorative justice emphasizes healing, personal responsibility, and repairing harm. This approach not only helps survivors heal but also reduces recidivism, ultimately making our communities safer. Moreover, restorative justice is not only more effective—it's significantly more cost-efficient than the traditional criminal legal system.

Oregonians are already benefiting from restorative justice where it has been implemented. To date, the Oregon legislature has invested \$8 million to support fifteen restorative justice programs. Approximately half of these programs have received funding since the Restorative Justice Grant Program's first application cycle in July of 2022. The other half are new programs, which received planning grants for the beginning of 2025 to develop the concept for their pilot programs. These 15 programs span a significant portion of the state, serving 17 different counties with one program accepting cases from anywhere in the state.

In 2024, the legislature invested \$4 million in the CJC's Restorative Grant Program for a one-year period, with the possibility of a three-month extension for established programs. \$2.7 million went to continue the seven established programs with \$1.3 million distributed to eight new programs seeking to expand access to restorative justice to other communities around the state. Based on these numbers, it is evident that an increased allocation is necessary to support the continued growth of the established programs and to provide an opportunity for the planning grant programs to move into their pilot stage. I am requesting that you recognize the importance of these programs and the value they lend to Oregon's public safety system by allocating \$8 million to the Criminal Justice Commission's Restorative Justice Grant Program and by including this grant program in the CJC's current service level budget.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. I respectfully urge you to support Oregon in maintaining its place as a leader in restorative approaches to harm, by investing \$8 million in these healing and transformative programs.

Sincerely,

Zahra Bandukwala