

TINA KOTEK
GOVERNOR



April 15, 2025

To: Senate Judiciary Committee
From: Racial Justice Council

Re: Opposition to Possible Net Widening of the Criminal Justice System

Dear Senator Prozanski, Senator Thatcher, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

The Racial Justice Council is committed to centering the voices and experiences of communities most harmed by Oregon's criminal legal system.

We write today to express our opposition to HB 2465A. This proposal expands the punitive scope of the criminal legal system at a time when Oregon should be investing in strategies that promote healing, restoration, education, rehabilitation, and public health—not longer prison sentences and broadened criminal liability.

We deeply respect the legislators sponsoring these bills and understand the concerns they aim to address. We offer this letter in the spirit of shared commitment to public safety, and with the hope that our position invites dialogue, not division.

Our concern is that this legislation moves us farther away from strategies that reduce our reliance on prison by reinvesting in a model of punishment that we know, through data and lived experience, does not reduce harm—or crime.

Why We Oppose This Bill

HB 2465A: Criminalizing Parole/Probation Failures

HB 2465A proposes to classify unauthorized departure from the custody of a parole or probation officer as the crime of escape. It also grants officers access to DMV photo records. Source: OLIS – HB 2465A

While expanding felony classifications is a concerning issue for the committee in general, we are particularly concerned that it transforms technical violations—into criminal conduct, potentially saddling individuals with new felony charges. The Department of Corrections has reported that nearly two-thirds of adults in custody have a history of substance use disorder, and many are living with mental health challenges and rarely are people in healthy states of mind when attempting to flee parole officers for supervision failures, and criminalizing those supervision failures pushes individuals deeper into the system instead of addressing root causes of instability.

The Evidence Is Clear: Harsher Sentences Don't Make Us Safer

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A 2022 Oregon Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) recidivism report found that longer prison sentences do not meaningfully reduce reoffending.

https://www.oregon.gov/cjc/CJC%20Document%20Library/RecidivismReport_may22.pdf The

National Institute of Justice affirms this nationally:

“The certainty of being caught is a vastly more effective deterrent than the severity of punishment.” Source: NIJ “Five Things About Deterrence,” 2016

Oregon has already seen how increased sentencing fails to produce better public safety outcomes. Instead, it expands state obligations to costly incarceration and exacerbates racial disparities—without addressing the underlying issues.

The Better Path: Invest in What Works

Public safety improves when we address root causes and provide effective interventions. We urge you to invest in and prioritize:

- Behavioral health and trauma-informed care
- Substance use treatment and diversion: Over 60% of incarcerated individuals have substance use disorder. Diversion programs can reduce recidivism by more than 25%. [Source: Oregon CJC Specialty Court Report, 2023]
- Education and reentry programs: Correctional education reduces reoffending by 43%. Source: RAND Report RR266
- Restorative Justice: Programs piloted in Multnomah and Deschutes counties produced higher victim satisfaction and lower recidivism. [Source: Oregon CJC, 2022–2023]

Our Request

We respectfully urge you to reject HB 2465A. This bill reflects a return to punitive strategies that evidence shows do not deter crime and risk damaging the reform momentum Oregon has built through years of collaboration.

We urge continued investment in evidence-based, proportional, and healing-focused interventions. This is how we move toward true accountability and safer communities—not through sentence inflation, but through recovery, restoration, and redemptive opportunity.

Sincerely and on Behalf of the Racial Justice Council,

Tristen Edwards, Racial Justice Council Member
Paul Solomon, Racial Justice Council Member

CC:

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Senator Dembrow
Senator Findley
Senator Gelser Blouin
Senator Linthicum
Senator Manning Jr.