

Youth, Rights & Justice

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

To: House Committee on Health Care, 2015 Oregon Legislative Assembly

From: Mark McKechnie, Executive Director, Youth, Rights & Justice

Date: February 20, 2015

RE: Support for HB 2557

Chair Greenlick and Members of the Committee:

Youth, Rights & Justice has represented more than 50,000 children and youth in the juvenile court system since 1975, including children in foster care and youth in the juvenile justice system. Since its inception in 2008 YRJ has represented every young person committed to the custody of the Juvenile Psychiatric Security Review Board (JPSRB) in the State of Oregon. There have been 27 of them so far.

This legislation recognizes the simple truth that recovery and reintegration of people in the justice system who are challenged by mental illness or developmental disabilities are consistent with and complementary to goals of public safety.

Many of the youths we have represented have grown up as wards of the state, and/or they have spent significant portions of their lives in institutions, prior to the commission of the offense that brought them before the JPSRB. Many of the offenses that have brought these youths under JPSRB jurisdiction were committed in these institutional settings. The lengthy confinement and institutionalization of these children did not necessarily benefit them or make the community safer.

At some point, institutionalization becomes counterproductive and harmful. Youth under the JPSRB jurisdiction need as many opportunities as possible to live in the community while there are systems in place to support and supervise them. They are most likely to be successful when they have been able to live in the community and prepare for the day when they may be on their own or will have less structure and support than they did under the JPSRB.

HB 2557 is an important step forward, but we would be remiss if we did not also highlight the fact that inadequate resources in the community to serve these youths also contribute to the problem. We urge the Oregon Legislature to increase the community resources available to serve these youths appropriately, and we urge the committee to support HB 2557.

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