

# OREGON LAW CENTER

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**Testimony in Support of SB 939**  
**Senate Human Services and Early Childhood Committee**  
**Submitted By: Sybil Hebb**  
**April 7th, 2015**

Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Olsen, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), I submit this testimony in support of SB 939, which would provide important benefits for children of incarcerated parents.

OLC's mission is to achieve justice for low-income vulnerable populations. One aspect of our work is participating in the coordinated community response to crime prevention and response. SB 939 will help vulnerable children of incarcerated parents to break the cycle of crime and poverty, increasing public safety and ensuring stronger families and healthier communities.

SB 939 is about caring for some of Oregon's most vulnerable children. Studies have shown that children whose parents are incarcerated struggle because of a loss of family connection, support, and stability. Children who are bereft of a parent due to incarceration struggle with psychological, emotional, and behavioral challenges. The impact of these challenges is manifest well after the initial parental separation, in higher rates of depression, delinquency, and addiction. Those dynamics in turn further trap young adults in the cycle of poverty.

We know that maintaining contact with parents is important to the emotional and psychological development of children. We have embraced this concept in the child welfare system, where family reunification and contact with parents who are able to be a positive influence on children is a high priority. Unfortunately, our policies have not similarly prioritized the needs of children of incarcerated parents.

SB 939 with its amendments will foster and support the maintenance or development of safe and healthy parent-child relationships, with the input of professionals and experts for guidance. Most parents in the justice system will be released and will re-enter the community, and their families. SB 939 will not only help children retain stability of relationship, but will also help inmates build parenting skills that will help with re-integration.

**SB 939 will give vulnerable children a chance to maintain ties with their parents, thus improving their odds at breaking the cycle of poverty and achieving success.** For these reasons, we respectfully urge your support of this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.