

Testimony in favor of SB 1005

April 5, 2017

On behalf of: Enlace
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Addressed to: Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee
Chair Floyd Prozanski
Vice-Chair Kim Thatcher
Senator Michael Dembrow
Senator Dennis Linthicum
Senator James Manning Jr.

Chair Prozanski, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to give testimony in support of SB 1005, the bill to divest PERS of financial interests in the private prison industry.

My name is Amanda Aguilar Shank, my home address is 3046 NE 67th Ave in Portland, Oregon. I'm the Interim Executive Director of Enlace, a non-profit organization representing low-wage workers based in Portland, and convener of the National Prison Divestment Campaign.

We are here today because our communities are hurting. Our families are being torn apart by criminal justice and immigration systems that should be sources of safety and fair application of laws, but that instead are inflicting deep harm and are the source of rampant human rights violations. The harm is felt sharply by immigrants, Muslims, Black and Indigenous communities, LGBT communities and people struggling with mental health and addiction. These are some of the most resilient, powerful, and valuable people in our community, but also the most targeted for incarceration and immigrant detention, especially by the private prison industry.

Under Trump, the harm we are facing is already compounding. Trump's budget plan includes \$1.5 billion in funding for the construction of new immigration detention centers,¹ an increase in the number of immigrants held in detention to 45,000 people every day.² Not surprisingly, since the election, stock prices for GEO Group and CoreCivic, the two largest for-profit prison corporations in the US, have more than doubled.³ The prison industry is celebrating Trump's election. In January, CoreCivic donated a quarter of a million dollars to his inauguration.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/16/us/politics/donald-trump-border-wall-budget.html? r=0>

² <https://www.wsj.com/articles/record-immigrant-numbers-force-homeland-security-to-search-for-new-jail-space-1477042202>

³ SEC filings

We can show you statistics to describe what we are experiencing. We can mention that nearly 4 million immigrants have been detained and deported in the past 10 years.⁴ We can tell you that right now 2.3 million people are incarcerated in the US, that we have 25% of the world's prisoners and just 5% of the world's population.

But behind each statistic are millions of stories. If you ask nearly any immigrant or person of color in Oregon, we will have a story to tell. My story is that my sister was held in a windowless GEO Group prison, where the only time she went outside was to a small concrete cube enclosed by four walls. She is still locked up. My story is that my cousin was detained when fleeing her home in El Salvador, fearing for her life, and held in a for-profit detention camp for months at the border. My story is that my neighbors are being tracked down at work, at home, in their cars, and suddenly detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) after living in this country for decades.

These stories are our everyday lives, even more so since January 20th.

Mass incarceration and immigrant detention are complex systems, but not too complex for us to disassemble them. When my organization, Enlace, began researching in 2009 what was behind a wave of anti-immigrant and tough-on-crime legislation, what we found shocked us. We learned that with the creation of a private for-profit prison and detention industry came enormous financial incentives to increase and expand the number of people incarcerated.

Our spending on prisons and detention has skyrocketed in recent years. A Department of Education report last year found that state and local spending on incarceration has increased three times faster than spending on education, and that we now spend over \$80 billion on incarceration.⁵

Now, we have learned that public employee pensions across the country, including the PERS system, are among the institutional investors that profit from and fuel this harm.

PERS is invested directly in CoreCivic (formerly Corrections Corporation of America) one of the two biggest prison corporations in the country. As of the close of the last quarter for which information is publicly available, PERS had \$1.2 million invested in CoreCivic.

PERS also invested in JPMorganChase, the Bank of America, Wells Fargo, the Bank of NY Mellon, and others. These are banks that fuel mass incarceration through lending and investing in private prison corporations.

It is no surprise that it was a courageous elementary school teacher in the Salem-Keizer school district, a district that is made up of 48% students of color, who decided to end the complicity

⁴ <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/obama-record-deportations-deporter-chief-or-not>

⁵ <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/report-increases-spending-corrections-far-outpace-education>

of her pension in this system. What a contradiction that teachers' financial futures are literally dependent on the continued incarceration of their students and students' families.

Now, we call on this legislature and the Oregon Investment Council to have the courage to align our investments with our values. There are other investment options. It won't be hard to find them. In a time of increasing attacks on immigrants and people of color, this is an opportunity for us as Oregonians to stand up with a different vision for what our communities need.

When PERS divests from prisons, we will become a national leader on this issue. Cities and Universities across the country are divesting from prisons, and from corporations complicit in human rights abuses and harm of many kinds, from divesting from the Dakota Access Pipeline to the Occupation of Palestine, to fossil fuels. This legislature now has the opportunity to act as well.

We thank Senator Taylor for the leadership that she has shown in bringing this bill to the Committee. We are committed to working with you and our partners at the Oregon Education Association as this legislation moves forward. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and we are happy to answer any follow up questions today or in the future.