



# Service Employees International Union, Local 503, OPEU

April 12<sup>th</sup> 2017

House Judiciary Committee Chair Rep Jeff Barker; Vice Chairs - Rep Andy Olson and Rep Jennifer Williamson and Judiciary Committee members:

My name is Gloria Soja and I live in Salem. I work for Oregon Youth Authority and am an SEIU represented employee –proudly serving our Local 415 as the Secretary/Treasurer.

I am writing in support of HB 3078 the Safety and Savings Act - a bill that is a forward thinking piece of legislation that modifies eligibility for the Family Sentencing Alternative Pilot Program. Others will discuss the mechanics of the bill but I want you to know that SEIU has endorsed this effort and I write here as an individual - to share my experiences.

While working as a corrections officer in a woman’s prison I saw first-hand, the impact of incarceration on families. There is something horrific about watching a young boy being dragged, kicking and screaming, out of a visitation room by a beleaguered relative. His mother's crime - possession of a substance most states have now declared legal. Or having a four year old see you in uniform and automatically turn around and raise his arms in preparation for the pat search that is about to happen. Mom was convicted on bad cheques - which she wrote at the direction of the person pimping her out. Justifiable? Hardly.

The majority of incarcerated women are addicts ; mothers and survivors of violent crime. Instead of providing treatment and programming that would allow these women to be successful, we separate them from their families and their access to drugs/alcohol, secure them in a life of 24/7 monitoring and order, and declare them "rehabilitated" when their time is up. But we have done nothing to provide positive coping mechanisms that will help them deal with the chaos they return to - the chaos of living in the world. True restorative justice doesn't and can't happen within the four walls of another prison. It has to happen in the community.

Yes, there are some in prison who truly do need to be there. But the majority of the people I encountered in my time as a correctional officer would have been better served through community based programs. Justice reinvestment matters. Reducing sentences and investing money in addiction and mental health treatment services makes sense. Thank you.

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