

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 3078
Submitted to the House Committee on Judiciary
By Amy Davidson, Crime Survivors Program Director
Partnership for Safety and Justice
April 12, 2017

Chair Barker, Vice-Chair Olson, Vice-Chair Williamson, and members of the Committee:

My name is Amy Davidson and I am the Crime Survivors Program Director at Partnership for Safety and Justice. We are a statewide, non-profit organization that has worked in Oregon since 1999 to advance policy solutions to crime that ensure justice, equity, accountability, and healing to achieve safe and strong communities. I'm asking for your support of HB 3078, The Safety and Savings Act.

I spent over a decade working with crime survivors and the people who hurt them at a supervised visitation center that was a program of a domestic violence & sexual assault agency serving Central Oregon. During that time, I met with countless survivors of domestic and sexual violence who had also become justice involved due to poverty and addiction-driven crimes, most often the result of a history of trauma. Many of these survivors were mothers who had lost their children as a result of incarceration. Universally, they reported a desire to expedite their system involvement for the sole purpose of returning to their children. But they had little to no understanding of the long-term implications of what it meant to take a plea and become a felon for a crime they often had little to do with. They would have agreed to anything to just get home to their children sooner.

I worked with over 500 families at the center. We found that the overwhelming majority of visiting parents who had been formerly incarcerated engaged for longer periods of time in our program and achieved far greater outcomes than those who were not engaged in services like Parenting Classes, Batterer's Intervention Programs, Addiction Counseling or Mental Health Services. It was also clear that they saw parenting as their greatest motivation for change.

Justice Reinvestment and the Oregon Domestic and Sexual Violence Services Funds helps fund programs like this whose focus is to maintain victim safety while addressing offender accountability in a supportive setting. For victims in the program who had custody of their children, they said what they really needed was for their children's father to just be a dad to their kids again, *so long as that could happen safely*. For domestic abuse offenders, this level of engagement with their kids became a personal touchstone to accountability in most cases. Allowing parents safe access to their children under supervision offered a form of healing and change that incarceration lacked.

As a former service provider, I can tell you that the justice system achieved neither safety nor savings for survivors or the state budget. Facing life on the other side of incarceration holds little to no promise for a single parent living in poverty, trying to maintain sobriety and living without housing or employment. Hence, the cycle repeats; for the survivor, her or his children and the system paying the same bill expecting a different outcome without providing the necessary services to achieve a better one.

For parents who won't have access to programs like this, and must remain in prison, we know their children will have higher rates of poverty, greater household instability and a host of other risk factors. They will also be far more likely to end up in prison themselves one day. And at the intersection of incarceration and race is a staggering statistic we cannot ignore. Black children are seven times more likely to have a parent in prison than white children.¹ In fact, Oregon's rate of incarceration of African Americans is 46% above the national average.² Realigning drug and property crime laws offers one measure of addressing this disparity while also avoiding additional prison costs. HB 3078 would realign sentencing for drug and property crimes to 2007 lengths; holding people accountable but ensuring cost savings to better achieve our shared public safety goals.

The Safety and Savings Act is a bold and necessary ask in bringing balance and fairness to Oregon's budget and its people. The alternatives to incarceration in this bill are cost saving with the promise of addressing underlying causes of crime, the biggest investment we can make. This is a giant step toward healing communities beyond measure. Please join me in supporting HB 3078.

¹ (Nickel, et al. *Children of Incarcerated Parents; an Action Plan for Federal Policy Makers*. New York Council of State Government Justice Center (2009)

² (Oregon Live 7/25/17 *Oregon Imprisons African Americans at a Higher Rate Than Most Other States*
http://www.oregonlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2016/06/oregon_imprisons_african_ameri.html