

April 13, 2017

Dear Members of the House Judiciary,

For my testimony in support of House Bill 3078, I'm going to submit my most recent homework assignment. We were told to read the OpEd by Representatives Sanchez and Piluso, two women that I highly respect and admire. I've been told that I have a unique perspective on these issues, so here is a sample. My hope is that this little bit of history can help lead you to a more informed approach on criminal justice matters involving women in Oregon.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Christine VanOrder

vanorder4oregon@gmail.com

Since I began my prison sentence nearly 20 years ago, I can personally attest to the phenomenon that is the skyrocketing female prison population. I watched it while it was happening—from the inside.

Michael Francke explained in a July 29, 1988, City Club of Portland event that women seem to be increasing their participation in criminal acts and that the female prison population was growing disproportionately faster than men. The issue was part of a published document provided to a task force. He noted that OWCC was already “well past” its ability to meet the needs of the current female prison population much less the projected numbers.

Fast forward ten years, ¹I was dragged from my cell on my third week at the old OWCC for *trying* to refuse to be transferred to an out-of-state facility while screaming at the top of my lungs and holding onto my bunk for dear life. “*No! You’re not going to take me! I won’t go! My son! I want to see my son!*” I was dragged by my hair to Administrative Segregation until I composed myself and agreed to go quietly. That officer dealt with it by the book, and yes, there is actually something called a “hair hold,” and they did what they were trained to do in the event of an out-of-control person, which I totally was. The female officers and a nurse then took the time to talk me down from a highly emotional state. I could tell that I’d made their night a little bit scary, but I was pretty terrified myself.

I experienced the negative effects of overcrowding on many occasions, but this was a time when the State of Oregon was desperately trying to put off prison construction so there were already women in Arizona at that time. That night was by far the most traumatizing event of my

entire incarceration. Just FYI, the Oregon Department of Corrections still utilizes out-of-state and county jail beds to deal with overcrowding.

I can appreciate the reason certain lobby groups are putting out the messaging that has obviously influenced Representatives Sanchez and Piluso's OpEd as well as House Bill 3078, but I don't see their proposed solutions as going far enough. I can certainly appreciate their history and experience with the criminal justice system, but I don't see \$17.5 million dollars as an unattainable amount of money compared to other budgetary priorities over the last few years.

²The \$175 million spent on the Columbia River Crossing project could have funded the cost of reopening OWCC for 10 biennia, which is 20 years.

³The amount of money spent on the failed Cover Oregon/Oracle project could have funded OWCC for 13.7 biennia, or nearly 30 years.

I'm not criticizing either of those projects or anyone associated with them, I'm just trying to point out budget priorities in general. I'm just trying to offer some perspective.

In my opinion, funding is not as much of an issue as priorities. Overcrowding at Coffee Creek needs to become a priority.

If you watch the ⁴YouTube video featuring the former head of the Oregon Department of Corrections that I mentioned above, you can see that the same problems that existed back in the 1980s exist now, which was right before one of the state's biggest prison bed expansions. Mr. Francke discussed the very real dangers of overcrowding, and as we can see from the ⁵recent uprisings at the Oregon State Penitentiary, it's obvious to me that we are past that boiling point and have entered into the ⁶danger zone.

The effect of overcrowding at the women's prison does result in violence; however, the more pressing problem that it creates, in my opinion, is that it restricts access to drug and alcohol treatment as well as educational programs like the ones facilitated by the Family Preservation Project. Due to long waiting lists and lack of space, too many women are exiting the system without the programming and opportunities that many people have fought for over the years.

I can appreciate the efforts to repeal Measure 57, but it will not "flat line prison growth" as some have claimed, because they claimed the same thing in 2013 with a series of *Smart on Crime* initiatives, yet we are still facing the same issues today that we face whenever we put off the inevitable. Thanks to putting off the inevitable, we not only need to revisit Measure 57, but we also need to reopen OWCC while we play catch up in the areas we have fallen behind.

In closing: I propose we open the old women's prison and use it exclusively for the Family Preservation Project.

¹See attached Disciplinary Report, 06-24-1998

²http://www.oregonlive.com/business/index.ssf/2013/07/columbia_river_crossing_spends.htm
|

³http://www.oregonlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2016/09/post_183.html

⁴https://youtu.be/m1WVsktqG_I

⁵http://www.oregonlive.com/pacific-northwest-news/index.ssf/2016/08/155_inmates_fighting_prompts_o.html

⁶<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/oregon/articles/2017-04-10/prison-fight-spurs-lockdown-at-oregon-state-penitentiary>