

June 19, 2017

Senator Jackie Winters, Co-Chair
Representative Duane Stark, Co-Chair
Ways & Means Subcommittee on Public Safety
Oregon State Legislature

Dear Co-Chairs Winters, Stark, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jessica Katz and I am the Program Director of the Family Preservation Project with the YWCA of Greater Portland. The YWCA works to eliminate racism, empower women, and promote justice and peace. The YWCA supports the Safety and Savings Act, HB 3078A.

Over the course of my work in the prison systems over the past 16 years, I have witnessed, and come to understand, the pathways that lead women to prison. The drivers of the property and drug crimes, for which the majority of women are incarcerated, have their root causes in poverty, addiction, mental illness and significant trauma loads. When we frame the conversation around the surge in our female prison population, as a public safety epidemic, we overlook the opportunity for public health interventions. We are treating the symptoms and not the disease, and this comes at a high cost.

As we face a \$1.4 billion budget deficit over the next biennium, our state will be forced to make some tough decisions. One of those decisions is to open a second women's prison in an effort to reduce the over-crowding at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility. The price tag on this proposal is \$17.5 billion over the next two years. This represents the financial cost to taxpayers. The true cost of incarceration on the children and families and communities left behind is higher still. The cost to the individuals who will contend with their felony convictions as they apply for jobs and housing to volunteering at their children's schools is higher yet.

The women's prison population is growing at an unprecedented rate. 85% of the roughly 1400-1500 women at Coffee Creek are mothers representing 2.5 kids each on average. We need to both address the needs of the individuals impacted by our current criminal justice policies, while simultaneously exploring more prudent remedies. It is urgent that we, as a state, begin to dig in to cure the disease, instead of continuing to treat the symptoms.

The Safety and Savings act is a step in the right direction. We ask for your support for HB 3078A today in getting behind these efforts.

Thank you,

Jessica Katz
Program Director, Family Preservation Project
YWCA of Greater Portland