

Co-Chairs Winters and Piluso, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Brandon Nielsen, and today I stand in front of you as someone who has greatly benefited from Justice Reinvestment Funding. I grew up in a very dysfunctional family that was full of addiction, and I experienced a great deal of trauma. I began using marijuana at the young age of eight, which then led to alcohol and other more serious drugs by the time I was in middle school. This addiction carried on for the next decade of my life. The first time I was arrested and charged with a crime I was in the sixth grade, which was just the beginning of twelve years of involvement in the justice system, leading to a real lack of education. During that period of time, I spent eight months running from the law after running from a boy's home I was placed in. While I was on the run, I was homeless and sleeping wherever I could lay my head, usually on the floor in my friend's garage, or sometimes even on the streets. Once finally caught, I was sent to the Oregon Youth Authority. After being released from OYA, I began attending high school again, only to be expelled shortly after. I spent the next five years deep in addiction suffering from depression which led to suicidal thoughts and multiple attempts to take my life.

In 2014, I was arrested and sent to prison for unlawful use of a weapon. After spending nineteen months in prison, I was released months early into what is called the RLAN program. RLAN is a program in Lane County that allows inmates to be released 60 days early to the county's work-release program. During that time, RLAN participants spend Monday through Friday at Sponsors' where they attend cognitive behavioral therapy, which makes things a lot easier when transitioning back into the community. One of these CBT groups in particular, Moral Reconciliation Therapy, or MRT, helped me immensely. Previous to MRT, I always bottled up the grief and trauma I had experienced and never made any attempt to speak to anyone about these issues, which just resulted in more pain and caused me to be very bitter and angry at the world. While attending MRT, I was required to address my past and to process the trauma, which was life-changing for me. Four days before I finished the RLAN program, I was told that my father had passed away in a car accident while visiting his mother in Arizona. Thanks to being released early, I was able to visit with my father before he died and was in a much better place to process his passing. Once I completed the RLAN program, I moved into Sponsors' transitional housing where I spent the next six months. During this time, I fostered the relationships I had made with Sponsors' staff and was able to develop an amazing support system that I still rely on to this day. Two and a half years later, I am before you a responsible father, a productive member of society, and working at Sponsors' as a lead case manager, giving me the ability to help others as I was once helped. All of this was made possible due to the programs that exist with the help of Justice Reinvestment Funding. I strongly encourage you to fund JRI at the current service level. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Brandon Nielsen
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