

Kate Brown
Governor



Oregon Commission for Women
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Letter in Support of HB 3300-1, Oregon Center for Incarcerated Mothers and Their Children and establishing a Gender Responsive Officer
April 8, 2019

Dear Chair Williamson, Vice-Chairs Sprenger and Gorsek, and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary,

The Oregon Commission for Women, in its role as advocate for the women of Oregon, strongly supports the proposed -1 amendment to HB 3300 and encourages you to positively consider its adoption during the work session for HB 3300. The -1 amendment provides a women's justice equity focus to the study of incarcerated populations by supporting the Oregon Center for Incarcerated Mothers and Their Children and establishing a Gender Responsive Officer to study, report and plan for policies and practices that support justice-involved women.

The 3300-1 legislation supports the national research on the impact of gender responsive practices on mass incarceration. Women's incarceration is disproportionately impacted by sexual violence, domestic abuse and related trauma, mental illness and poverty. However, gender responsive programming can make a difference in helping to lower recidivism, improve safety and achieve better mental health outcomes for women. An analysis of 37 studies and almost 22,000 women in correctional settings who participated in gender responsive correctional interventions found that 22% to 35% had greater odds of community success than non-participants.

The Oregon Center for Incarcerated Women and their Children (formerly the Family Preservation Project) is an example of a gender responsive practice at Oregon's Coffee Creek Correctional Facility. This program recognizes that imprisoned mothers and their children are a critical component within the vast criminal justice system. In Oregon, eighty-four percent of incarcerated mothers had at least one child living with them before incarceration. There is evidence that the systemic impacts of maternal incarceration on the children of female inmates are devastating, with children facing long and short term social, economic, health, academic and psychological barriers to their success. In fact, one of the strongest risk factors for juvenile delinquency is a parental history of criminality. For incarcerated mothers, imprisonment, compounded by separation from children, is particularly damaging. This is exacerbated by the lengthy mandatory minimum sentences for specified nonviolent drug and property crimes stemming from the state's Measure 57. Current state policies may permanently terminate parental rights based on the length of incarceration regardless of her nonviolent history or desire to parent.

The Oregon Commission for Women endorses the successful work by the YWCA of Greater Portland to promote systematic change to help reduce the collateral damage of parental

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incarceration on children, families and the community. The Center supported by state, city and community leaders, takes an organic approach to overcome the profound consequences of prison through parenting programs and other wrap-around services for the incarcerated and newly released mothers, their children, and other providers of familial support. The services have been shown to reduce recidivism for the women, promote positive parenting between mother and children, reduce the number of children placed in foster care, and increase successful academic, social, behavioral and emotional outcomes for children.

The Oregon Commission for Women is a strong supporter of the YWCA's Center for Incarcerated Women and Their Children. Commissioners have served as members of a state's task force to review the Center and have provided legislative testimony in support of continuing state financial support. Most importantly, commissioners have visited incarcerated women at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility to hear the stories of incarcerated mothers and to witness program services first-hand. Our assessment is that the Center under the leadership of the YWCA of Greater Portland has provided a positive intervention to address the social, educational and mental health consequences of incarceration for mothers and families.

The social costs of imprisonment are significant and long lasting. With every new generation of criminalized women and children the net widens, increasing numbers of individuals and families being drawn into the cycle of criminalization, child protection, poverty and despair at great cost to the state. At the same time, they are being drawn away from social and economic productivity and contribution.

The Oregon Commission for Women believes that traditional criminal justice policies and practices have been developed through the lens of managing men and can only provide a unique pathway for justice-involved women by implementing gender responsive systems. HB 3300 is the best response to meeting this important issue and we urge the House Judiciary Committee to adopt the amendments during the work session for HB 3300.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dr. Barbara Spencer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Dr. Barbara Spencer
OCFW Chair