

Oregon Voices News

News from Oregon that you can use

Oregon Voices Supports Justice, Fairness, and Rational Laws

Oregon Voices is committed to justice and rationality in policies regarding sex offenses and will continue to work toward supporting legislation that will positively impact the lives of registered citizens and their families. OV strives to provide up-to-date information about such things as seeking relief from the registry and Oregon's use of the Static-99R to establish classification risk levels.

What a year and a half it has been for everyone! In addition to the ramifications of COVID-19, we have experienced many other unusual events. Of course, the most stressful were for parents and other family members who worried about a loved one serving a prison sentence. And, of course we were very concerned about those AICs who had to endure this period by spending so much of their time in isolation. The inability to visit the various Oregon prisons meant that people have gone for a very long time without being able to see one another. Then, to make matters worse, some AICs had to be relocated due to Covid outbreaks or very thick smoke from wildfires.

There have been a myriad of other issues. Some of you most likely experienced job layoffs and/or housing evictions as a result of the pandemic. Others haven't been able to participate in traditional celebrations or even travel to attend important events. And, ironically, several of you endured power outages for a few weeks due to snow and ice storms!

Through it all, some of us have managed to stay involved through ZOOM meetings (as if we had a choice) as a way to connect with families, keep abreast of the work of our state legislators, and advocate for changes in laws that affect the lives of RCs and AICs.

It is a relief to hear that some of you are being allowed for the first time in over a year and a half to regain visitation opportunities in some of the federal prisons now that the DOC is scheduling visits at 12 prisons. To find out more, go to the DOC website: <https://www.oregon.gov/doc/visiting/PAGES/covid-visiting-rules.aspx>

This newsletter will hopefully provide some useful information to keep us all on a positive track in our efforts to move forward. On another note, the OV website is almost complete and contains a wealth of useful information. In the future, you will probably see some duplication between the website and the newsletter; however, since AICs cannot access the website, repeating some of the information in the newsletter is necessary.

This past year has taught most of us the importance of supporting all of our local reentry programs and other non-profit organizations with volunteer work and donations. As an organization, Oregon Voices has become acutely aware of the value of reaching out and joining other non-profit groups in order to build a stronger coalition when advocating for change.

Finding Ways to Better Handle Mental and Drug Abuse Crises In Our Communities

The Council of State Governments is sponsoring several workshops that will help communities rethink how they address situations that might typically fall outside of police duties. Rather than being handled by law enforcement officers, community responders might be deployed instead. There is a movement though out the United States to create response teams like CAHOOTS in Eugene who are trained and can handle calls that most often deal with mental health or drug abuse issues. An opinion piece published on July 15 in *The Baltimore Sun* by the CSG Justice Center's Dr. Ayesha Delany-Brumsey and the Bureau of Justice Assistance's Kristen Mahoney explores the changing nature of crisis response and how new programs position mental health professionals as first responders. They point out that a recent analysis of 911 call data in eight U.S. cities found that between 23% and 39% of calls for help were low-priority or non-urgent calls, such as noise complaints, loitering or non-urgent medical needs. Communities are also seeing a notable increase in the number of mental health and substance abuse crisis calls.

These workshops are designed to help communities through their local, state and federal government agencies and non-profit groups develop response teams. Unfortunately, a couple of them will take place just before this newsletter is published but there is still one you might be able to join and most likely there will be more opportunities during the coming months. If you are interested in the next event, "How Certified Community July 29, from 2:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., please go to the CSG Justice Center for more information: info@csgjusticecenter.org



2021—A Mixed Legislative Session for Oregon Voices

On the Positive Side: Small Successes and Hope for the Future

This session saw four bills introduced that were designed to make major changes in Measure 11. All of them proposed converting mandatory minimums to presumptive sentences making people eligible for more programs and possibly for sentence reductions. Only one of these four bills excluded sex offenses. Although none of these proposed reforms passed this session, these proposals were a crucial step forward and had strong backing from influential legislators and from a number of our allies.

Bills were also introduced to:

- create a DOC ombudsman position to provide advocacy and support for AICs (see below)
- reform the way that DOC deals with health issues for AICs (see below)
- provide that a defendant's reasonable belief that a victim consented could be used as a defense in some 2nd and 3rd degree sex abuse cases and under certain circumstances, remove the requirement to register (passed and signed)
- eliminate monthly fees for people on supervision (passed--awaiting Governor's signature)

We have never seen anything like this kind of effort to make significant, evidence-based reform of the way that the state of Oregon deals with Measure 11 and with sex crimes.

Still, for Some of Our Hopes, the Future Isn't Here Yet

There simply weren't enough votes in this legislature to get all of this agenda through this year.

- Proposals to convert mandatory sentences to presumptive systems died, as did the effort to allow good behavior to count toward sentence reductions. A final bill finally did pass that could allow good behavior inside to count toward a reduction in supervision time, although not for persons with sex offenses.
- Neither the ombudsman bill nor the reforms in DOC health system passed this time, but a bill did pass both houses that will establish a committee to study the DOC health system; that committee must contain at least two members who are former AICs or family of an AIC. That bill is currently awaiting the governor's signature. The committee's report may lead to bills reforming DOC health care in the future.

It is disappointing that some of this good effort came up short. But there is determination on many fronts to continue the fight, and the surge of support this year offers a solid basis for hope in the future. We plan to work with the organizations that supported this year's effort on new proposals for the 2022 session.

OV Offers Advice to Those Looking for Services Upon Reentry

Covid-19 has made a difficult situation even harder for people reentering their communities after prison. The pandemic and other recent crises present new challenges to finding limited community resources in greater demand by all— especially housing resources. Whether just released from prison or living independently in stable housing for years, many people with criminal histories have lost or are vulnerable to losing their current housing situations and starting over again in times of uncertainty.

Oregon Voices provides resource information across Oregon for housing, employment, education and other services such as food pantries, behavioral health services, legal services, as well as tools and tips to successfully locate these resources.

We would like to call your attention to the three excellent resources produced by the Fair Housing Council of Oregon that have been added to the Oregon Voices Website at www.oregonvoices.org that specifically focus on housing. “Moving Forward with a Past” provides valuable tips and reminds people of their rights and responsibilities when searching for housing. Two of the resources, “Successful Housing Practices To-Do List” and “Writing a Letter of Explanation” are also included as part of this newsletter.

Successful Housing Practices To-Do List

Steps to finding housing for those with a conviction history

1. Complete a Housing Needs Profile
A housing needs profile allows for you to think about starting your housing journey. It will determine preliminary barriers you might experience as well as come up with a plan to attain long-term stable housing.
2. Complete a Barriers Worksheet
Recognizing your barriers from the Housing Needs Profile, you should be able to identify any that you experience. From there, discuss what you are currently doing to mitigate those barriers and how you can show this to potential landlords.
3. Letter of Explanation or Reasonable Accommodation
Utilizing the Barriers Worksheet, write a letter of explanation or a letter for reasonable accommodation (whichever is appropriate). You can include this in your application.
4. Reasonable Accommodation Form
If applicable, have a third party such as a doctor, mental health professional, or counselor verify your disability.
5. Letters of Reference
Gather letters of reference to strengthen your application. These also serve as evidence to back up what you have stated in your letter.
6. Certificates
Gather certificates for various programs you have completed as they will continue to strengthen your application and attest to what you have stated in your letter.
7. Income Verification & Identification
All housing applications will require income verification, an ID, and often a request to see your Social Security card.

8. Rental Applications

Fill out a Master Rental Application. It will serve as a guide and make it easier to fill out applications for different property management companies. Now all that's left is to submit applications directly to property managements where you want to live!

Writing a Letter of Explanation

A letter of explanation can contextualize the barriers to access that may come up as you apply for housing. This strengthens your application by helping a potential landlord see how much progress you have made.

Brainstorming: Before you begin writing your letter, reflect on your goals. If one of them is to secure stable permanent housing, think about what type of housing you need. For example, do you need multiple bedrooms for family? How will you achieve those goals? How do you get someone to care about your story and give you the chance to secure the housing you need?

Writing Your Letter: Be transparent and honest about what has happened in your past but also recognize the positive choices you have made recently as well as what you are doing to maintain your progress in the present. Honor your growth and point to concrete steps you have taken to make changes. Discuss the strides you are making to continue sustaining your progress.

Letter Structure: First, acknowledge barriers, then clarify your financial stability and lastly, describe the changes you have made as a person and how you plan to sustain your progress.

Reasonable Accommodation: In your letter be sure to state that you have a documented disability and acknowledge how your disability contributed to any relevant rental barriers. If applicable, discuss steps you're taking to manage/treat your disability such as seeking therapy, support groups etc.

Reference Letters of Support: In addition to your own letter of explanation, it's a good idea to include additional letters of support from people in your life you can attest to the positive choices have been making.

Additional information

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Oregon CURE Publishes An Exceptional Reentry Guidebook

The Oregon CURE administration recently posted a comprehensive reentry guidebook, "Mapping Your Future – Oregon Edition" on their webpage:

<https://oregoncure.org/transition/>

They are to be commended for putting together such an informative manual that offers over 90 pages of helpful advice. A copy of this guidebook is being made available in every Oregon prison for use by any AIC wanting to do so.

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Call For Submissions

The newsletter is soliciting contributions of artwork, poetry, or short pieces up to 250 words for inclusion in future newsletters. We reserve the right to edit pieces to fit the constraints of the newsletter, and when it is possible, we will consult with authors about proposed changes. We would like to feature the voices of our readers inside.

Thanks to our first contributor who completed this sketch with colored pencils. He noted that good quality colored pencils are available in the Commissary at ODOC.



Life Cycle

Insiders Corner (cont'd)

OV Plans to Set Up a Connection to CorrLinks

CorrLinks is the official email system used by the Bureau of Prisons to allow federal inmates to communicate with those on the outside. It is also used within the Oregon Department of Corrections facilities. Inmates must pay in order to use CorrLinks; however, it is free to those on the outside. If you are incarcerated and want to send someone an email and have the money to pay for the service, then you could send a request from CorrLinks to that person asking if it is okay for him/her to send an email. The person can respond by saying yes or no. Then, an AIC can send emails to that person and others who have given their permission. It can also work the other way around with someone on the outside initiating the request.

OV will create a special email address to share with CorrLinks in order to correspond with AICs in Oregon. A contact person has been appointed and OV feels that it would be a good way to help AICs transition back into the community before their actual release date. Board members agreed to try it for a period of six months and then reevaluate how much it is being used. Stay tuned for further details.

Sources That AICs Can Contact To Receive Books

Books to Prisoners is a volunteer run, donation based organization that provides free reading materials to incarcerated individuals. Prisoners can request books by sending a letter including their name, prison ID number, and address to:

Books to Prisoners,
c/o Left Bank Books
92 Pike Street, Box A
Seattle, WA 98101

Rogue Liberation Library believes in the right to read and that books are tools for liberation. This all-volunteer, nonprofit organization is located in Southern Oregon's Rogue Valley. They do not send legal materials. Instead, they provide educational and recreational reading materials in multiple subject areas. Request books by subject, not by specific titles. Limit requests to once every three months. List prison book restrictions if known. Books are sent free of charge to people in most federal prisons; and state prisons (no jails) in OR, CA, ID, TX and NV only. Website: <https://peacehouse.net/RLL/>

Mailing Address:
PO Box 3418
Ashland, OR 97520

Governor's Office Commutes AICs Who Served on 2020 Fire Crews

On June 22, 2021, the Governor's Office notified the Department of Corrections that sentences would be commuted for some adults in custody (AICs) who worked on DOC fire crews during last year's wildfire season. In recognition of their service, each AIC's eligibility was reviewed on a case-by-case basis, first by DOC and then by the Governor's Office; the result being 41 AICs were approved for sentence commutation. 23 of those AICs are scheduled for release on July 22, 2021 providing they have acceptable housing in place and the remaining 18 AICs will have 12 months removed from their sentences. AICs who have been approved for commutation will be notified through their release counselor by the end of the month.

Wouldn't it be fantastic if these newly released individuals could join some fire teams during this year's fire season? Just think of it! They could actually be employed, earn money to support themselves and give back to their communities. What a win-win deal!

Oregon's Partnership for Safety and Justice Continues To Advocate For Better Use of Prison Costs

In 2013, the Oregon Legislature passed HB 3194, which made several modest sentencing changes and created the [Justice Reinvestment Grant Program](#). Oregon's Justice Reinvestment Program is a nationally renowned approach to public safety that keeps communities safe, eliminates prison growth, and invests a portion of averted prison costs back into communities for crime prevention, treatment programs, and crime survivor services

Much of the credit for the creation and passage of this bill goes to Oregon's Partnership for Safety and Justice (PSJ). They recognize that our state's prison system is too big and that investing in communities saves lives, strengthens families, and creates long term success and safety for all Oregonians. OV appreciates and thanks them for all of the work they continue to do. Visit their website: <https://safetyandjustice.org/justicereinvestment/>

Check Out The Newly Reconstructed OV Website!

It has been well over two years since OV embarked on a much needed redo of its website. Although it is still undergoing some final changes, there is no need to wait to begin accessing information! The website contains links to various community resources as well as relevant information on legislation and registration. There is a new sidebar that keeps you updated on current news and other pertinent information.

<https://www.oregonvoices.org>

OV reminds those who are accessing references listed for housing to be sure to ask for referrals to other resources if they are turned down. Feedback is also encouraged from those accessing the OV website when searching for housing.

<https://www.opb.org/article/2021/05/17/supreme-court-retroactively-non-unanimous-juries/>

The Supreme Court Hands Down A Recent Ruling Related to The Unconstitutionality of Non-Unanimous Jury Convictions

Last year, the Supreme Court ruled that non-unanimous jury convictions were unconstitutional. In May of this year, by a 6-3 vote, the justices decided that this decision doesn't apply to old cases. They went on to clarify that their ruling only applies to federal cases and that states could choose for themselves whether to retroactively apply the ruling.

In an interview on OPB, Oregon's Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum commented, "My office remains committed to reviewing every case presented to us that involves a request for a new trial." She also went on to say that if the legislature decides to apply the new rule retroactively to post conviction cases, her office stands ready to help implement any policy decision it may make. For detailed information, please listen to the interview on the OPB website:

<https://www.opb.org/article/2021/05/17/supreme-court-retroactively-non-unanimous-juries/>

Oregon Voices has confidence that the Criminal Justice Reform Clinic at Lewis and Clark Law School will continue its efforts in identifying and assisting those individuals who can request a new trial.

Plans To Hold the Next General Meeting In September

OV board members have tentatively scheduled the next OV General Meeting to take place on September 11 at Hilltop in Oregon City if they determine that it is safe to meet in person by that time. If we resort to holding another ZOOM meeting, we will have the option of planning it on either September 11 or 12. Watch for further information.

Last, But Not Least

Oregon Voices is committed to working with other organizations within our state sharing a common goal of creating better support for our registered citizens and their families. We invite you to join us in our efforts. Help is always needed to work on such things as housing, employment opportunities, legal resources, the website, legislative issues and the OV newsletter.

If you are reading this newsletter and would like more information about Oregon Voices or wish to volunteer in some capacity, please call 971-317-6868, or email:

info@oregonvoices.org

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