

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. We are especially proud of those OV volunteers who formed a team during the 2022 legislative session in order to identify bills that we should watch and encourage us to write letters or give testimony during judiciary hearings.

You Make a Difference

Have you told yourself that writing to the legislature doesn't make a difference? A letter to your state senator or representative may seem like one of millions and won't have an impact on the outcome. Did you know that one of the bills that Oregon Voices followed last session only had ten letters from constituents? That is right; there were ten letters in total including all of the pro and con comments. Other bills may have more comments but the letters are all tabulated by staff and the positions are recorded. Every letter that you take the time to write does make a difference and the process is simple. Here is an outline of the 2022 session for you to consider as you prepare to participate when the next session convenes in January 2023.

The Oregon Legislative Information Service (OLIS) website can be found here <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov> and includes everything you need to make your opinion known to the legislature. You can also search for individual bills and glean more information so you can make informed decisions.

Oregon Voices had some significant successes this year. **SB (Senate Bill) 1510** garnered considerable statewide attention and was supported by many of our allies. This bill placed limits on traffic stops, reformed Parole Officer training and procedures, and required law enforcement to inform traffic stops of right to refuse searches. It also made important changes in how county corrections interact with persons on supervision. Search for this bill on the OLIS website for more information. Pay attention to how your senator and representatives voted. We are likely to see an expansion of the provisions of this bill next session.

Other OV successes included **HB (House Bill) 4075**, which funds a study of the effects of restitution on recidivism. **HB 4120** waves or defers filing fees for inmates suing public entities. **SB 1584** allows for compensation when wrongly convicted and incarcerated.

Oregon Voices supported some bills that did not pass during this session. On even numbered years, the legislature only meets for 35 days and many bills never make it to a floor vote. The 2023 session will be six months long and we may see some of these bills resurrected. **SB 1511** would have assisted inmates convicted of non-unanimous juries. **SB 1512** would have reformed teacher and other professional licensing standards pertaining to past convictions. **SB 1568** would have studied early release for inmates who are elderly or medically fragile. **HB 4147** would have allowed inmates to vote while incarcerated. Each of these bills has significant merit and by studying them we can learn how to better craft bills next year to improve our chances of success.

“I have not failed 10,000 times—I’ve successfully found 10,000 ways that will not work.”- Thomas Edison

Every member of OV can have an impact on the legislative process. In fact, a small group of dedicated people has consistently worked on this for over 15 years. We have them to thank for the progress that has been made. If each of us takes on a part of the burden, the work for each will be small and the results will be large. How will you be able to help next year?

The Oregon Criminal Justice Commission—the Real Story

Gov. Kate Brown has been harshly criticized for the number of commutations she has issued during the Covid pandemic. Although most of the commutations were issued on medical grounds, district attorneys and others have argued that her actions threatened public safety. However, the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission recently released a preliminary study that suggests these criticisms are misplaced. Although the full study has not been completed, early results reveal recidivism rates similar to those of former AICs who have completed their full sentences.

That story made news in Oregon recently, but perhaps the bigger story here was not this particular study, but rather the work the Criminal Justice Commission does on an ongoing basis. For some years, the CJC has devoted significant resources to data gathering, providing solid information for the legislature and public agencies on criminal justice concerns.

This recent study is just the latest example of the important work they do. CJC research drove the push for what came to be known as the Justice Reinvestment Initiative. The JRI resulted in legislation designed to reduce Oregon’s reliance on prisons. Funds saved from prison use are being reinvested in diversion programs, drug courts, increased use of community supervision, and services and support for crime victims.

Most important to us in Oregon Voices is the research that the CJC released in 2017 that for the first time broke out sex offenses from other crimes. That study debunked the popular assumption anyone who has committed a sex offence is a sexual threat. It found that not only

did persons who had served time for a sex offense have significantly lower rates of reoffending for any kind of crime than other previous offenders, but that just 1.8% of persons released after a sex crime were convicted of committing a new sex crime within three years.

Oregon Voices maintains ongoing conversations with the CJC. We believe that the work they do is critical to future progress in our work toward evidence-based rather than fear-based legislation on sex offenses.

Oregon Justice Resource Center Announces A Huge Victory For Those Who Contracted COVID-19 While In Prison

The Oregon Justice Resource Center (OJRC) filed a lawsuit two years ago, at the beginning of the pandemic as a response to the failure of the Department of Corrections and Governor Brown “to fulfill their responsibility to protect Oregonians in prison from COVID-19.” Since that time, OJRC reports that 5,300 AICs contracted COVID and 45 have died.

On April 1, 2022, OJRC announced that Judge Stacie Beckerman has agreed to certify two classes in the lawsuit: “one related to people who contracted COVID-19 while in ODOC custody and one for the families of the people who died of COVID in state prisons.”

OJRC thanked the plaintiffs for their bravery and tenacity “to protect and vindicate the rights of all Oregonians in prison” and commented, “Today’s decision by Judge Beckerman to certify the wrongful death and damages classes is truly momentous for Oregonians in prison and incarcerated people across the country.”

You can read the joint statement from Juan Chavez, Director, Civil Rights Project, Oregon Justice Resource Center and David Sugerman, Attorney, Sugerman Dahab on OJRC’s link: <https://ojrc.info/media> or you can read more information about it on the OPB website: <https://www.opb.org/article/2022/04/04/oregon-prisons-covid-19-cases-pandemic-response-class-action-lawsuit/>

New Housing Possibilities

During our last OV General Meeting, an OV individual announced a new housing program that had just opened up called Mountain Crest Recovery and is located in Linn County. It is being run by a group that spun off of Free On the Outside that is also looking to expand and is searching for more housing. Free on the Outside now has 29 recovery residences and can serve as a refuge for people on the registry.

Information about the OV Relief Handbook

The Relief Handbook is a publication that OV will make available to help people who are seeking relief from registration through the Parole Board. It will serve as a starting place for people to learn how this process works and how to go about gathering up necessary records. While we are a bit behind on this project, we are hopeful for its completion in the near future.

Supporting One Another In Preparing For Relief from the Registry Hearings

Some members of the Board have volunteered their time to give advice and to hold mock hearings to assist OV individuals who have applied to get off the registry. Their contributions have proven to be quite helpful.

In addition, Zoom meetings have been held so that those who have succeeded in achieving relief from the registry can share information, answer questions, talk about experiences, alleviate fears, and, most of all, regenerate hope for others who are in the process of applying for relief.

Trillium Community Health Partners With CAHOOTS

A recent article, published February 4, 2022, and written by Tatiana Parafiniuk for the *Register Guard* describes a partnership between the insurance company Trillium and CAHOOTS. Parafiniuk stated: “Trillium Community Health Plan is partnering with White Bird Clinic’s crisis response team CAHOOTS, providing funding through a model that could be replicated across the country — getting more Medicaid funds into the hands of communities’ behavioral health first responders.”

Parafiniuk reports “Trillium will support CAHOOTS’ services in Eugene and Springfield through funding of about \$200,000 a year. The exact number may fluctuate; the health care organization will pay a certain amount of cents per member enrolled in Trillium Medicaid insurance who lives in Lane County per month.”

The CAHOOTS Crisis Team has been operating in Eugene for 33 years and has been very successful de-escalating crisis situations. It has worked very well with the police departments. At present dozens of cities across the nation are looking at the CAHOOTS model as they begin to build similar programs in their own communities.

Up to this point, CAHOOTS relied solely on the Lane County and the police departments for funding. Thanks to Senator Ron Wyden, who introduced federal legislation called the National CAHOOTS Act, the American Rescue Plan was passed which provided \$15 million in planning grants for state Medicaid agencies to help set up behavioral health response

services around the country. These grants will give states an estimated \$1 billion in additional federal Medicaid dollars for mobile crisis services in the coming years.

Oregon should feel proud to have been instrumental in creating opportunities for cities throughout the country to be able to receive grants in order to set up crisis services and better serve the most vulnerable citizens of their communities.

<https://www.registerguard.com/story/news/2022/02/04/trillium-partners-cahoots-provide-funding-medicaid-money-white-bird-eugene/6643201001/>

Note: A follow-up article, published April 9, 2022, in the *Register Guard* announced that CAHOOTS has purchased two more emergency response vans thanks to additional funding that they have received.

<https://www.registerguard.com/story/news/2022/04/09/cahoots-new-crisis-response-vans-white-bird-clinic-federal-grant-eugene-oregon-police-de-escalation/>

Oregon CURE (Citizens United For Rehabilitation of Errants) Offers A New Opportunity for Those Wanting to Attend Their Monthly Meetings

Several individuals who subscribe to Oregon Voices also belong to one of the four CURE chapters in the state. Monthly meetings for adult family members and friends of the incarcerated take place at Salem, Eugene, Beaverton, and NE Portland. Since the start of Covid restrictions, meetings have been conducted virtually via Zoom.

Recently, Oregon CURE has arranged for a **statewide** Zoom support group for those unable to meet in person (or want to participate in 2 groups). Contact them at oregoncure@gmail.com if you are interested in joining the statewide Zoom meeting which will be held the first Wednesday evening of each month at 7 p.m. and will last roughly 90 minutes.

Have Questions? Need Information? Check Out the Oregon Voices Website!

OV board members wish to thank all those who participated in constructing such an exceptional website! If you haven't taken the time to visit it lately, you should since it contains a wealth of information. Presently, there are a couple of OV individuals who volunteer to keep the site up-to-date. The home page features a column on the right-hand side that gives information about current issues and events. Contact information is provided if you have some news items that you wish to contribute.

www.oregonvoices.org

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We have been dedicating a portion of our newsletters to feature the creative work of Oregon's AICs (Adults In Incarceration) and this time we would also like to feature a poem written by a former insider while behind prison walls.

TOUR OF PRISON

This is the sound of a reverberating bunker, stocked with beds
 Their brown and white blankets absorbing the interlaced signals
 Of cards shuffling on tables and people shuffling together in their prison suits
 This is the sound of cups banging down on tables
 The sound of basketballs thundering against impenetrable windows
 Leaving marks like thin paper snowflakes
 This is the phone which connects you to your family by a thin wire
 Like the ones embedded in the hearts of cardiac patients, it establishes a life rhythm
 But why must distance and trouble, like Death, be the measure of hearts?
 This is the sound of your heart thudding in court, your family waiting in the wings, another
 pawn taken by surprise
 These are the sounds of a chess game in progress, and here are the black surveillance domes
 (which one is the human eye under?)
 What cares enough to surveil is as much a mystery as that which is surveilled--
 Overveiled and opacified, we walk in circles outside the public eye, and under a surveilled
 one
 Substituting one set of promises for another, as one step follows another
 And here, as one number follows another, shouted into our bunker
 This is the sound of doors clicking open and slamming shut and watch--
 Our Pavlovian conditioning cascades neurotransmitters into hallways
 Of our soft mechanisms
 And these are the vinyl gloves that protect the deputy from what is in them
 Genes or germs, what you have is family
 Here are the visiting rooms, the lungs of the prison
 Here is the wash of prisoners in uniforms in one breath, and then the multicolored wash of
 family
 In the other, hunting Easter-egg style for their loved ones, who are waiting in their vestibules
 behind the plexiglass
 Here is the telephone again, and the exchange of vital courage
 Palms against the glass, closing the circuit of the Self
 These conductive paths, the Self within and the Self within the Other
 And here we can detect the end of poems, and these circumstances
 Eventuating, as the outer doors open, and the families leave after the last visit
 Here is the sound of conversation rising and falling, and the anonymity of sleep
 Where we lose memory of who or what or where we are
 Yet inexplicably find ourselves in the company of friends

Insiders Corner (continued)

Those of us in Oregon Voices want to thank a very talented AIC who has graciously contributed one of his amazing drawings, “Cat Daze.”



“Cat Daze”

Recently, Oregon Public Broadcasting featured an interview on *Think Out Loud* about offering college classes to women incarcerated at Coffee Creek. You can follow the interview, "Program bringing college classes to women's prison has 'really, really grown'" by clicking on the following link:

<https://www.opb.org/article/2022/03/14/portland-state-classes-coffee-creek-womens-prison-oregon/>

Call For Submissions:

The newsletter is soliciting contributions of artwork, poetry, or short pieces up to 250 words for inclusion in future newsletters. You don't have to be an AIC in Oregon. Remember that some Oregon AICs are housed out of state in military detention facilities or federal prisons. Your artistic contributions are also welcome. We reserve the right to edit pieces to fit the constraints of the newsletter, and when possible, we will consult with authors about proposed changes. We would like to continue to feature the voices of our readers who are on the inside.

Lauren Kessler Releases Her Latest Book This Month

"Free: Two Years, Six Lives, and the Long Journey Home" by Lauren Kessler is now available for purchase at Amazon.com and Powells Books, among other places books are sold. *Note: For every copy of Free by Lauren Kessler sold between 4/1 and 5/27, Sourcebooks will donate a galley to Chicago Books to Women in Prison, a nonprofit organization all-volunteer group that distributes paperback books free of charge to incarcerated people nationwide, focusing on all women and trans/non-binary people.*

Kessler points out that 95 percent of the millions of American men and women who go to prison eventually get out and her book reveals what awaits them when they are released. She follows six people, representative of the thousands released from prisons every year, whose varying stories illustrate an intimate picture of struggle, persistence, and resilience upon reentry. What is the road they must travel from caged to free? How do they navigate their way home when faced by institutionalized obstacles and logistical roadblocks, grinding bureaucracies, lack of resources, societal stigmas and damning self-perceptions? This book should enlighten many readers about what life is like after serving prison time. *Note: In 2019, Lauren Kessler authored another book, "A Grip of Time: When Prison Is Your Life." It takes readers into a world most know little about—a maximum-security prison—and into the minds and hearts of the men who live there.*

Plans To Hold the Next General Meeting In May

The next OV General Meeting is tentatively scheduled to take place on May 14 or 15. A decision will be made at the next OV Board meeting as to the specific date and time. There may be a possibility to meet in person or we might have to continue meeting virtually. Check the OV emails or the updated OV website for further information.

Last, But Not Least

Oregon Voices is committed to working with other organizations within our state who share 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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