

Saving lives, money and resources, 10 percent at a time

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In 2013, Oregon lawmakers changed our public safety course, putting us on track to create safer, healthier communities.

The Justice Reinvestment Act (HB 3194) of 2013 averted our need to start building a new prison in Oregon, saving taxpayers an estimated \$300 million over the next five years. The savings from averted prison growth are intended to be invested

back into the community through the important local public-safety programs that help people succeed, like addiction treatment, mental-health services, victim services, and re-entry support for people released from prisons and jails.

Oregon is not the only state involved in reprioritizing public safety spending. Nearly half of the country engaged in a similar process after they, too, recognized the impact of the overuse of expensive prison beds on their state budgets. We at Partnership for Safety and Justice are excited that Oregon is one of these states. We are also proud that Oregon is providing Justice Reinvestment funds for victim services in the community, as well as funds for people convicted of crimes. Beginning in the 2015-17 biennium, counties will allocate at least 10 percent of Justice Reinvestment funds to community-based nonprofit victim services.

Oregon is the first Justice Reinvestment state to recognize that community-based nonprofit victim services are vital parts of our public-safety system and deserve additional funding so that more victims can access the safety and support services they need. Community-based nonprofit victim service organizations offer comprehensive assistance that enables crime victims to become survivors, helping people whose

lives have been altered by violence to meet their immediate and long-term safety and self-sufficiency goals. These vital programs include domestic and sexual violence services organizations, programs for murder victim family members, restorative justice services, and organizations that assist children who have been abused.

When the 2012 Governor's Commission on Public Safety was identifying how Oregon could best rebalance our public safety system, Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum hosted two roundtable discussions with crime survivors and victim advocates to establish Justice Reinvestment's priorities for crime victims. Thirty-five survivors and advocates attended the roundtable discussions, representing the diversity of victims' needs and experiences. Between the two roundtable discussions, 13 priorities were identified to improve victims' rights and services in Oregon. Of these priorities, the one that rose to the top was increased funding for community-based domestic and sexual violence services.

Domestic and sexual violence services programs address the immediate crisis needs of survivors and offer long-term support while survivors rebuild their lives. As a result, many survivors continue to work with advocates for months or even years beyond the initial help of accessing safe shelter, crisis counseling, court accompaniment, safety planning, obtaining protective orders, and applying for benefits. Programs provide support groups, assistance in returning to school, finding living-wage jobs, and support finding safe and affordable housing. Ongoing support is provided without time restrictions, because this is what allows people who have been harmed by violence to create and maintain the long-term change needed to become safe and rebuild their lives.

Services are available to survivors whether or not the survivor reports the violence and engages in the justice system.

This is significant because research consistently shows that most survivors of domestic and sexual violence never choose to reach out to the justice system for help. Most survivors are harmed by someone they know, often a family member or another person intricately involved in the survivor's daily life. Survivors want the abuse to stop and might want the offender to be punished, but not necessarily by serving a long prison sentence. A long jail or prison sentence can cause the breadwinner to lose his or her job, the family to lose its home, and the youngest victims of all to lose their parents.

Thankfully, Oregon's domestic and sexual violence services offer survivors and their children an effective way to get safe — and stay safe. Research has shown that survivors who maintain contact with advocates for six to eight hours a week for as little as 10 weeks decrease the likelihood of being assaulted and increase their ability to access the resources needed to remain separated from their abuser. A report by the Johns Hopkins University revealed that accessing domestic violence services reduced re-assault by up to 70 percent. Accessing shelter and support services was even more effective than intervention by law enforcement or the courts.

Despite this, Oregon's domestic and sexual violence services are severely underfunded. In 2013, almost 12,000 requests for emergency shelter from violence couldn't be met because of a lack of resources. That's almost two unmet requests every hour of every day of the entire year.

Oregon legislators were wise to allocate at least 10 percent of Justice Reinvestment funds to community-based nonprofit victim services programs. We look forward to seeing counties invest this crucial funding into key — but often overlooked — pieces of our public-safety system that literally save victims' lives.

PARTNERSHIP FOR SAFETY and JUSTICE

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