

Justice Reinvestment – it's about good dollars and sense

BY BILL BARR

Thank you for your recent coverage on



Justice Reinvestment, "Human Investment; the politics of trying to keep people out of prison," in the March 19, edition. This statewide initiative is of

great importance to a broad and unlikely coalition of supporters including police, sheriffs, probation officers, judges, district attorneys, treatment providers, victim advocates, counties, justice and business organizations.

As chair of the Citizens Crime Commission, I work closely with our executive director Suzanne Hayden and our board of volunteer business leaders in our mission of mobilizing citizens to reduce crime, improve civility and strengthen communities. Over the last 27 years we have advocated for a better justice system that focuses on outcomes and data to drive decision making. We believe House Bill 3194 embodies that pragmatic and effective approach to public safety by providing the best return on our public dollar investments. The Crime Commission strongly supported the bill. At the end of the day, public safety policy and spending should be about what works to decrease crime and improve the health and safety of our communities.

House Bill 3194 has created the potential for a sea change in our state's criminal

justice system. The 2013 legislature passed the bill in an effort to head-off the imminent construction of a new prison at a public cost of \$600 million over 10 years. In addition to some sentencing changes and a provision to transition prisoners back to communities 90 days early, the legislature sought to flatline prison growth through statewide Justice Reinvestment grants to local communities initially seeded with \$15 million. The legislation included a plan to continue funding future grants with prison savings and costs avoided by not building a prison. This unique approach challenged communities to rapidly innovate their approach to public safety in order to reduce their use of the most expensive corrections option; prison. Enhanced funding for community resources, including probation, housing and treatment for addiction or mental health issues, is less expensive than prison and has been shown to be effective at reducing recidivism. The current projections demonstrate these early efforts are on track to save the state nearly \$58.5 million this next biennium. Fully funding the Justice Reinvestment efforts makes for effective public policy. The reinvestment efforts support incarceration where it makes sense while creating opportunities to invest in tested alternative interventions when that course is likely to be more effective.

Bill Barr, the Crime Commission Chair, is the former CEO of Lifemap Assurance, a Cambia Healthcare subsidiary. Bill is currently a business consultant.

BY DAVE WILLIAMS

As the Vice President of Utility Services



for NW Natural Gas, I work with balancing outcomes against investments to achieve the best returns for the dollars spent. I have served on the Crime Commission for many years and bring that perspective to examining crime policy as well. As

the former chair of the commission, I was very involved in supporting the passage of House Bill 3194 as a smart-on-crime approach to improve our return on public safety investments. That legislation is starting to show those returns.

For the past two years, the Crime Commission has been at the table with community and criminal justice leaders in Multnomah County, developing and implementing a more informed approach to sentencing that reduces reliance on prison while at the same time investing those initial innovation dollars in treatment, supervision, mentoring, and housing. Why? Because that is what works. Not only has research shown the effectiveness of treating the root causes of criminal conduct, but we are already seeing the early positive human results. If the state does not fully fund Justice Reinvestment efforts, it will be forced to build a prison with public funds. That does not make good sense. In order to sustain these changes, the state must continue the investment in what works to keep people out of prison. The reinvestment makes good sense on every

level.

On a recent Thursday evening, I attended the Multnomah County Justice Reinvestment milestone event held the third Thursday of every month at the County Commission board room. Being at this event was an incredible experience, and I could see in real time how this approach is being implemented and the positive early results. The stories I heard from the program participants, their mentors, probation officers and counselors were emotionally moving. The room was packed with family and friends and all the people in the system who gave a helping hand. The Crime Commission did the right thing in supporting this effort. With more experience using this informed sentencing process, the better the results are going to be. Customizing treatment, counseling and mentoring tailored to the individual's risk and needs are making a positive difference. One father stood up in the room and told us "I am so thankful that this program existed and thank you for giving us our kids back." Almost every milestone recipient mentioned the special focused treatment and persistent oversight is what makes it work. These early results are promising and outcomes are being closely measured and analyzed by the county and the state. Investments the legislature makes now in local communities will pay future dividends not only in lower prison costs, but in safer and stronger communities.

Dave Williams is a Vice President of Operations for NW Natural Gas and a former Crime Commission chair.



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