

What a long, strange (and successful) session it's been

BY SHANNON WIGHT
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

Each legislative session has its own unique feel, but few people at the Capitol could have anticipated the roller-coaster ride of Oregon getting a new governor just a couple of weeks after the session began. Through the anticipated – and unanticipated – twists and turns, smart public safety reforms passed in the Oregon Legislature as criminal justice reform continued to gain momentum across the nation.

Less than two weeks after the close of Oregon's legislative session on July 6, President Obama granted clemency to 46 prisoners in a symbolic step toward recognizing the harm of our failed public safety policies and over-reliance on incarceration over the past three decades.

The Oregon Legislature did not make any grand gestures like President Obama's, but Partnership for Safety and Justice and our allies made important progress in the area of smarter public safety.

Here's some of what we accomplished:

HB 5506 Prioritizing Crime Prevention over New Prison Construction

PSJ's priority this session was continuing the success of the Justice Reinvestment program. Enacted in 2013, Oregon's Justice Reinvestment Act has successfully flat-lined prison growth by introducing modest sentencing changes as well as increasing investments in local programs and services that help prevent crime, like mental health services, addiction treatment, reentry services, community corrections and victim services. After a proposed allocation of only \$20 million at the beginning of the 2015 session, PSJ and its members, coalition partners, and allies successfully lobbied for increasing Justice Reinvestment funding to \$40

PARTNERSHIP FOR SAFETY and JUSTICE

Shannon Wight is the deputy director at Partnership for Safety and Justice, a statewide, nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to making Oregon's approach to crime and public safety more effective and just.

million for the coming biennium. This investment was crucial to keep Oregon on track to avoid building a new prison and to strengthen local communities. It's noteworthy that 10 percent of the Justice Reinvestment funds will go to help victims of crime.

HB 3503 Helping Kids and Families Succeed

Children thrive when they're nurtured, supported and loved by caring adults. But imagine the impact on a child when their loving caretaker is kept away from home for an extended period of time – not because the parent has harmed the child or another person, but because our public safety system is over-using prison to deal with non-violent offenses.

The Oregon legislature passed the Family Sentencing Alternative Pilot Program (HB 3503) with broad

bipartisan support to address this issue. Under the new law, parents who have been convicted of certain nonviolent offenses and have custody of minor children will be eligible for intensive probation supervision instead of prison while receiving a range of services – such as parenting skills classes, drug and alcohol treatment and vocational training. HB 3503 will create the pilot program in five counties: Deschutes, Jackson, Marion, Multnomah and Washington.

HB 3476 Respecting Victims' Safety and Confidentiality Needs

When survivors of domestic and sexual violence reach out for help from trained advocates, it's important that their personal information is protected. Thanks to HB 3479, domestic and sexual violence services in the community and on college campuses will be able to provide safe, confidential support. HB 3476 gives these service providers the authority they need to keep survivors' communications confidential.

HB 3025 "Banning the Box" on Job Applications

Partnership for Safety and Justice took part in a successful coalition led by the Urban League of Portland, AFL-CIO, and Oregon Action to reduce employment barriers for people with criminal records by "banning the box" on

job applications that ask about previous convictions. The bill gives qualified job-seekers with convictions a fair chance to be hired. Communities are safer when people with criminal records can earn an honest living for themselves and their families.

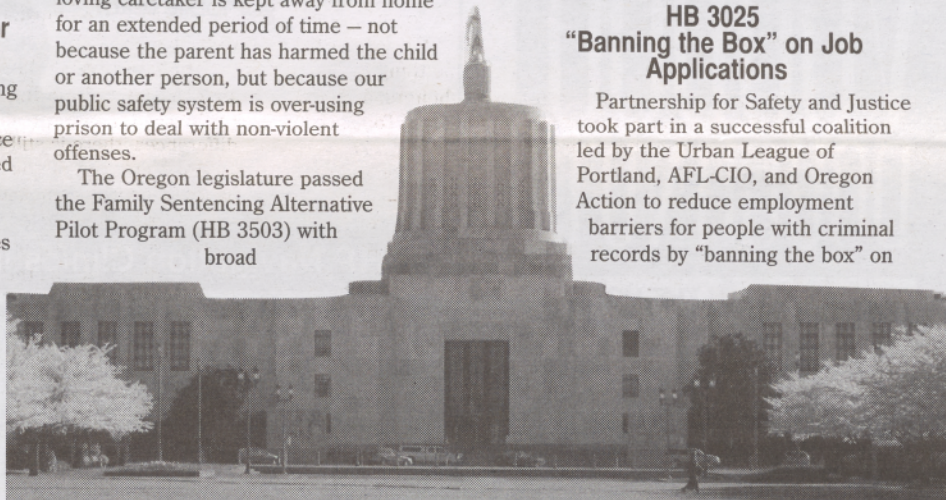
HB 2002 Ending Racial Profiling

The Center for Intercultural Organizing mobilized a coalition of allies – the Urban League of Portland, the Portland NAACP and others – to end racial profiling by creating uniform reporting requirements and establishing a process for reporting complaints. Addressing racial disparity is one of the most important issues we face in the world of criminal justice reform, and HB 2002 is an important step in the right direction.

Still Fighting for Youth Justice Reform ... and More

While we and our social justice allies accomplished much this session, we have more work to do when it comes to youth who get tried and convicted in the adult system as a result of Measure 11. Like many crime policies passed in the 1990s, this one is long overdue for reform.

Given the wave of momentum behind criminal justice reform that's currently sweeping across the nation, the opportunity has never been greater to rethink our outdated and ineffective crime policies here in Oregon. We're already making great progress, but our work isn't nearly close to being finished. With support from everyone from the president to local legislative leaders on both sides of the aisle, there is reason for optimism. At the same time, we should not underestimate what it will take to build an effective system that we believe in, rather than simply tearing down one that have now.



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Gary Cobb
Community Outreach Coordinator,
Central City Concern