

Fighting to Protect Youth...

During past economic downturns, the Oregon Youth Authority was hit with large cuts. As a result, at-risk youth didn't get the treatment they needed to successfully reintegrate into their communities and tragic consequences ensued.

At first 2009 seemed no different. OYA was a gavel hammer away from devastating cuts in February and June.

But this time SEIU 503 members at OYA stood up for the youth they serve and made the case that cuts to the public safety system could not be balanced on the backs of vulnerable youth.

The OYA facility in Burns, which provides treatment for youth sex offenders and is the largest employer in its community, was slated for closure twice during the session. The members in Burns, along with their co-workers across the state and community members, fought until the very last day. In February, members in Burns testified in Salem, called, faxed and e-mailed their legislators and saved the facility from closure. OYA took cuts in February, but no facility was closed.

Just one month later, the Burns facility was back on the cut list, as were other facilities and beds for youth throughout the state. The OYA members gathered together and had a lobby day in Salem. More than 20 members testified and another 20 supported them, making the case to legislators about the important services they provide to youth throughout the state. While many of the cuts were taken off the table after the lobby day, the Burns facility and beds for youth at Hillcrest were still facing closure in May.



OYA Steward Tony Diener, chief steward Ken Ross, member James Farmer, organizer Joe Schaeffer, steward Lorna Houston, and local vice president Dan Murray confer on Lobby Day. Soon after, OYA members were mourning the death of Murray, a popular long-time SEIU 503 activist, and dedicating their efforts to his memory. He is sorely missed.