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MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Major Public Safety Policy Package Passes House

A Significant Step toward a Smarter Criminal Justice System

Partnership for Safety and Justice (PSJ) is a statewide, advocacy organization that works to make Oregon's approach to public safety more effective and more just. PSJ has played an active role in this legislative session working with legislators and public safety stakeholders to identify policy reforms that maintain and even strengthen public safety while saving money in the process. Many of the policy reforms that PSJ advocates for are included in HB 3508, a landmark omnibus public safety bill that just passed the House and is expected to pass the Senate.

"Much of this bill is an acknowledgement that there are smarter ways to address crime and public safety than Oregon's status quo," says David Rogers, Executive Director of Partnership for Safety and Justice. "Oregon's prison spending has been skyrocketing and ineffective, and the country's economic crisis demands we do better. HB 3508 is a legitimate attempt to protect vital public safety infrastructure in these tough times, while finding smart ways to spend less on corrections."

Overview of HB 3508:

Includes the following policies that maintain public safety while saving money:

- Phases in the implementation of the most costly parts of Measure 57, providing fiscal flexibility and helping to protect funding for community-based addiction treatment.
- Allows earned time for probationers, providing a useful rehabilitation incentive while also reducing probation case loads in order to focus greater attention on high risk offenders.
- Increases available earned time for a group of non-violent offenders from 20% to 30%. This is a modest version of a proven model from Washington State that reduced recidivism and saved Washington State millions of dollars. This policy includes a sunset provision in four years, which is enough time for the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission to study its effectiveness.
- Reduces the amount of re-incarceration time for technical violations of felony probation terms. This focuses sanctions more appropriately for minor violations of community supervision.

The bill also includes some sentencing enhancements for DUI Assault III and kidnapping, and gives the Parole Board flexibility to lengthen the time between review hearings.

The money saved by this bill protects much of Oregon's public safety infrastructure from significant cuts including: the Oregon State Police, Oregon Youth Authority, Victim's Services, Community Corrections, public defense and more.

Economic Pressures and Short-Term vs. Long-Term Changes

The motivation behind this bill comes from the \$4 billion deficit projected earlier in the legislative session. The Co-Chairs of the Ways and Means Committee used multiple strategies to develop a workable and balanced budget. One of those strategies included accounting for a policy package that could save roughly \$80 million in reduced need for prison beds. The Judiciary Chairs and the Co-Chairs of the Public Safety Subcommittee were charged with developing that policy package. HB 3508 falls short of producing that \$80 million of savings but it does prevent roughly \$50 million of cuts to public safety agencies to be reversed.

Much of the debate around the development of this omnibus package has been about whether the legislature should take a short term or long term approach to savings.

"The District Attorneys Association seemed open to exploring almost any idea as long as it didn't point toward long term reforms," says Rogers. "The DAs don't acknowledge that Oregon has a real problem when it comes to corrections spending, a problem this economic crisis has highlighted but not caused."

"We are pleased that HB 3508 includes some smart criminal justice reforms that take a long-term view. Although we still have a lot of work to do, this bill does begin to address the unsustainable trajectory of Oregon's prison spending. We needed more than short-term savings. The legislature got it right by including some safe and sensible sentencing reforms that make the state's approach to public safety more cost effective."

District Attorneys Negotiate Several More Months of Measure 57

The District Attorneys Association has been lobbying to allow Measure 57 to continue to be implemented at least another six months. They have suggested more implementation time will allow more reliable information about the true costs of the law. The DA's Association have consistently challenged the estimated costs of Measure 57 and suggested that implementation will be much cheaper than expected.

"The point should not be missed that the DAs have a vested interest in showing that Measure 57 is less expensive than projected and they have the power to manipulate the numbers. Let's face it, the DAs are the gatekeepers in the criminal justice system and if they want to make Measure 57 look inexpensive, they have control over who and how they charge" says Rogers.

Delay of Measure 57 Actually Reflects Public Priorities

The proposed delay of Measure 57's implementation raised questions about what voters wanted when passing the measure last November with 61% support. Measure 57 distinguished itself as a more balanced approach to addressing addiction-driven crime when compared to Measure 61 because 57 promised a heavy investment in drug treatment. Yet, given the economic crisis, it became clear early in the session that state resources might not allow for meaningful funding of community based addiction treatment.

"Ironically, delaying the implementation of Measure 57 actually reflects the will of the voter," says Rogers. "This delay helps prevent cuts to community-based addiction treatment which was the most compelling part of Measure 57. Our organization was a key member of the steering committee for the Measure 57 campaign, and we are absolutely okay with the delay. The tens of thousands of voters we talked to during the election campaign were supporting 57 as a primary way to defeat the draconian Measure 61, the measure Kevin Mannix paid to put on the ballot."

Statewide polling from this past March shows that Oregonians recognize the state is in a dramatically different situation economically than when Measure 57 was passed. The poll results show, for example, that a majority of voters would support modifying or delaying Measure 57 in order to protect community-based addiction treatment and mental health services.

Findings from a Survey of Registered Oregon Voters conducted by Grove Insight

March 10, 2009 *This analysis is based on 500 interviews among registered Oregon voters. The survey was conducted March 4-8, 2009. The margin of error is plus or minus 4.4 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence. The margin of error for subgroups varies and is higher. Throughout this report, we refer to "younger" and "older" voters. Younger voters are those age 49 and under and older voters are those age 50 and older.*

Given the severity of the projected state budget deficit, some have proposed delaying or modifying the implementation of the most costly parts of Measure 57 and, instead, would like to use the money to reduce the size of the proposed cuts to community based addiction treatment, mental health services, and other critical human services. Having heard this, **do you favor or oppose the proposal to delay or modify implementation of Measure 57, or aren't you sure?**

