

**For Immediate Release  
Friday, June 19, 2009**

**Contact: David Rogers  
503-449-8866**

## **MEDIA AVAILABILITY**

### **Major Public Safety Policy Package Fails**

#### **Oregon's Justice System Heading in the Wrong Direction**

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. The Oregon House had an opportunity to pass HB 3508 today, a landmark omnibus public safety bill, but the bill failed to gain the 40 votes necessary to pass.

*"Oregon's approach to public safety just took a giant step in the wrong direction," says David Rogers, Executive Director of Partnership for Safety and Justice. "HB 3508 was designed to not only protect significant parts of our public safety system from serious budget cuts but also to institute reforms that made our system smarter and more cost effective. We are deeply disappointed in the bills failure."*

*"As a result of the bill's failure we will see fewer Oregon State Troopers, cuts to our juvenile justice system, less money for supervision of probationers, jail beds, addiction treatment, public defense services and victims' services. These are important elements of our local public safety infrastructure."*

#### **A Two Thirds Vote Necessary – A Very High Bar:**

Because the bill included changes in the implementation of Measure 57, a property crime measure passed in last November's election, the bill required a two thirds approval of both the Oregon House and the Senate. That requirement equals 40 votes in the House and 20 in the Senate. This is a very high bar. In 1994, Measure 10 was passed which requires a 2/3 vote of the legislature to change criminal sentences passed by Oregon voters.

*"The two-thirds requirement is bad policy. It makes it very difficult for the legislature to make necessary adjustments to criminal law based on changing times, new research, and challenging economic situations," says Rogers. "Just because Oregon voters pass something doesn't mean that public opinion doesn't change over time with new information. The two-thirds requirement prevents legislators from doing their job."*

## **Economic Pressures and Complicated Political Dynamics**

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. There are enough examples from around the country where states have successfully trimmed corrections spending while effectively maintaining safety. This approach was not precedent setting.

Nonetheless, the Oregon District Attorney's Association posed significant barriers to this bill moving forward. It was perplexing to many legislators and other stakeholders how the DAs were determined to pitch their own money-saving proposals in opposition to the legislative package of HB 3508 and its earlier versions. The DAs proposal changed on a daily basis and often contradicted the very principles they used to critique the legislative proposal.

*"It was truly amazing and disappointing at how much the DAs worked to prevent this bill from moving forward in ways that seemed at times more about maintaining their own power than strengthening Oregon's approach to public safety," says Rogers. "The DAs critiqued the evidence-based plan to modestly increase earned time for a narrow group of non-violent offenders while promoting a vague and unstructured approach to letting a larger group of prisoners out the back door."*

*"Of course, partisan politics didn't help the future of this bill. The Democrats recognized that when dealing with such profound economic problems, Oregon needed more cost effective approaches to public safety. Unfortunately, they couldn't get the necessary Republican Votes."*