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Press Release

Victims and Victim Advocates Call for Reduced Prison Spending: Services Not Sentences

Today several crime victims and victim advocates gathered at the state capitol to hold a press conference asking for a different approach to public safety spending. The message being delivered is clear: **crime victims have not been served well by Oregon's ever-increasing prison spending.**

Victim advocates want to ensure the legislature takes concrete steps to contain and decrease prison spending and reinvest those savings in smarter approaches to public safety.

"There is a problem when the state's prison budget is \$1.4 Billion but funding for life-saving domestic and sexual violence programs barely breaks \$4 Million," says Terrie Quinteros, the Executive Director of the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. "We hope legislators begin to shift our public safety policies and spending in ways that reel in prison spending and invest in prevention and programs that help protect crime survivors and assist them in rebuilding their lives. Overall, crime survivors and victims have not benefitted from Oregon's ever-increasing and unsustainable prison spending."

Rebecca Peatow Nickels, Executive Director of the Portland Women's Crisis Line, agrees that Oregon's exaggerated corrections' spending isn't getting money to where it is needed most. *"Tragically, life-saving programs can't meet the need because of lack of funding. In 2009, over 19,500 requests for emergency shelter from violence in Oregon couldn't be met because there weren't enough resources available," says Rebecca. "Our public safety spending is out of balance."*

The movement among victim advocates asking for a shift in public safety spending and policies comes from an increased understanding of Oregon's dramatic focus on prison spending over the past 15 years. The Department of Corrections (DOC) currently makes up 67% of state general fund spending on public safety agencies.

A report released in February by Oregon's Legislative Fiscal Office entitled: "Correctional Spending Trends" identified the DOC budget as "one of the largest commitments of resources in the state budget representing roughly 8.9% of the combined General Fund and Lottery Funds..." and "...also one of the fastest growing parts of the budget..."

The report goes on to say that if there is any one factor that has increased the prison population and correctional spending, it has been the changes in sentencing laws since the mid 1990s. The average length of sentence and therefore the number of offenders under the supervision of DOC has increased significantly.

Much of the immediate focus is on Measure 57 and Measure 73, the most recent and costly crime measures. Kerry Naughton, Crime Survivors Program Director for Partnership for Safety and Justice, says *“New increased sentences—like Measure 57 and Measure 73—will add to corrections’ costs, without making Oregonians measurably safer. I, along with many other people in the victim advocacy community, want legislators to prioritize services over new sentences.”*

Today’s press conference is asking legislators to continue the delay of Measure 57 (a property crime measure passed in 2009) and to modify Measure 73 (a drunk driving measure passed in 2010) as concrete steps to shift Oregon’s public safety spending toward a smarter, more comprehensive approach that ensures adequate funding of victim services, addiction treatment and mental health services, the State Police and the Oregon Youth Authority.

“It’s time we start rebalancing public safety spending to ensure that every victim who makes the brave step of coming forward for help has access to services that can save her life,” says Rebecca Peatow Nickels.