

For Immediate Release
Monday, December 12, 2011

Contact: Shannon Wight
503-335-8449

Press Release

Youth Avoid Adult Prison, Go Straight to Juvenile Lock-Up

On December 15th, the Oregon Department of Corrections and the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) will no longer conduct initial intake of juveniles convicted as adults at the adult prison, Coffee Creek Correctional Facility. Rather, those youth will go straight from county supervision to an OYA facility.

Partnership for Safety and Justice (PSJ), a non-profit advocacy organization, pushed for the change after hearing from members that the prison was not appropriate for youth. **Keeping youth at an adult prison presents a situation with no good choices.** During the intake procedure, youth are either held in isolation for up to 23 hours a day for their safety, or they can be integrated into the adult population. Authorities at the Department of Corrections and the Oregon Youth Authority were receptive to PSJ's concerns and changed the policy soon after hearing from the group. This policy change will positively impact about 100 youth each year.

"Youth are safest and best served by the system that was designed to meet their needs. Housing youth for any period of time in adult prisons and jails can be detrimental to their physical or mental health and also is bad for public safety," says Shannon Wight, Associate Director of Partnership for Safety and Justice. *"This is an important policy shift for Oregon and we commend Max Williams and Colette Peters for moving so quickly to make it happen."*

Despite a ballot measure passed in 1994 that requires certain youth be tried in the adult criminal justice system, **Oregon has tried to keep youth out of adult prisons and jails.** In 1995, just after Measure 11 passed, the legislature made it possible for those youth to serve significant amounts of their sentence with the Oregon Youth Authority rather than an adult prison. The law allows some youth to remain in an OYA facility until their 25th birthday.

However, there are places where youth are still ending up in adult jails. During the 2011 legislative session, Partnership for Safety and Justice helped pass HB 2707 which changed the default placement for youth charged as adults from adult jails to juvenile detention before and during trial. Due to the state's economic challenges, the bill didn't mandate or fund the change. So there are still counties that keep youth who haven't been convicted of anything in adult jails.

“This change is a good step in the right direction, but more needs to be done,” said Liz Ryan, President and CEO of the Campaign for Youth Justice, which wants to end the practice of youth being tried in the adult criminal justice system, ***“Oregon’s commitment to best practices in juvenile justice flies out the window when youth are automatically transferred to the adult criminal justice system, sentenced to long mandatory sentences and saddled with life-long felony convictions.”***

Numerous studies have found that youth who are prosecuted and sentenced in the adult criminal justice system are more likely to commit future crimes than youth who are held accountable through the juvenile system.