



Oregon CURE

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Volume 39

Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants

A Newsletter for Families and Friends of Incarcerated Individuals

1631 NE Broadway, #460 Portland, OR 97232
(503) 977-9979 (Portland Area) 1-877-357-CURE (Outside Portland)

Panel Supports Justice Reinvestment by Kris Vala

Oregon's seven-member Commission on Public Safety was appointed by Governor John Kitzhaber to study, review and report by December 15, 2011, on how the state can best balance public spending to support public safety. Current costs are not sustainable and according to Les Zaitz in his article in the Oregonian (October 30, 2011) "prison spending has soaked up ever more state money, hitting \$1.3 billion out of the state's \$13.6 billion two-year general fund budget". These costs have been increasing while crime rates have actually been decreasing. The commission is looking into all aspects of Oregon's criminal justice system and has also been looking to other states to see what has been more cost effective. Research has shown the benefits of "justice reinvestment, the idea that public money does more good when spent on prevention and rehabilitation than on building prisons to hold more inmates for longer terms" as described by Mr. Zaitz.

One state that has had great success with cutting prison costs while promoting safer communities is Texas. A statement by Representative Jerry Madden from the Texas House of Representatives was presented to the Commission which explained how the Texas Legislature "enacted a package of criminal justice policies designed to prevent the predicted growth in the prison population and save \$443 million. To improve success rates of people under supervision, we reinvested \$241 million to expand the capacity of substance abuse and mental health community-based treatment and diversion programs..." Madden also explained in the Public Safety Performance Project (No.4, January 2008) that Texans were able to overcome partisan differences and concerns that could be seen as being soft on crime by turning the debate from one that said being "tough on crime" to one that says "be smart on crime".

Oregon's own Partnership for Safety and Justice also uses the slogan of being "smart on crime". Their research has shown that crime rates are decreasing throughout the nation and that an increase in incarceration is not the main cause. On the contrary, "states with higher than average incarceration rates experienced smaller declines in crime than states with lower than average incarceration rates." In contrast "to the one size fits all approach of Measure 11, a system was implemented in New York designed on evidence-based practices that reduced crime rates and decreased incidents of recidivism."

The goal of the Public Safety Commission is to find ways to control ever-rising prison costs while promoting public safety. Let us hope that Oregon can redirect its criminal justice policies for a sustainable future with programs that build communities, not more prisons. This is in fact what the Governor's panel has recommended - to support justice reinvestment so that taxpayers dollars are spent more efficiently in prevention and rehabilitation rather than longer sentences and more prisons. An editorial in Eugene's Register Guard, published on January 3, 2012, stated that Chief Justice Paul Demuniz, who was the chair of the Commission, referred to the extensive research of evidence-based programs nation wide that should help in terms of sentencing reforms.

The Commission has asked for a six-month extension until July 13th, to continue reviewing sentencing policies and to increase its membership with other representatives of the criminal justice system. In addition to Chief Justice Demuniz, the Commission currently includes former Governor, Ted Kulongoski, four lawmakers, and Dick Withnell, a Salem auto dealer.

The report also recommended that the 2013 Legislature have a greater focus on cost-benefit analysis when looking at sentencing reforms, as well as giving judges more discretion in sentencing practices.

In order to promote safer communities it seems reasonable that "there has to be investment in better programs at the local level", which was suggested by Craig Prins, the executive director of the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission, who is helping the panel with the report (Editorial in The Eugene Register Guard, December 31, 2011).

An article in The Oregonian on December 30, 2011, described the Commission's findings on the importance of cutting recidivism by better preparing prisoners to return to their communities. It stated "In 2011, Oregon prisons released 4,500 inmates, but just 2.5 percent of the \$1.4 billion budget at the Corrections Department is spent on programs and education for those in prison to prepare them for re-entering society."

Continued on Page 4

Oregon CURE
1631 N.E. Broadway, #460
Portland, OR 97232



Oregon CURE Mission and Goals

Our mission statement:

To reduce crime by advocating for effective criminal justice policies and practices.

Our goals are:

Provide information and education to the public

Continue to develop a positive working relationship with the Oregon Department of Corrections and related agency partners.

Increase membership, funding base and support to incarcerated citizens, their families and friends.

Develop and maintain the administrative infrastructure necessary to achieve the above goals.

To ensure you receive your copy of the Oregon CURE Newsletter, please remember to send us your change of address so we can update our database.

Please Note: Effective Immediately

Due to the high cost of printing materials Oregon CURE will now begin charging \$2 each for booklets requested. **We will continue to provide all items free of charge to incarcerated individuals.** Those booklets currently include: "Sometimes You're the Hammer, Sometimes You're the Nail," "Free-er – but Not Free," and "Keeping Love Alive." When making your request, please include a check made out to Oregon CURE. Thank you.

Finding Strength and Purpose through Tragedy by Sheri Helvey

Through a single push and an accidental tragedy, our lives were forever changed. 18 months ago my 21 year-old son Brandon unintentionally injured a young man and is now serving a 55-month sentence at one of the toughest Correctional Institutions in Oregon, SRCI. Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined how painful and devastating this journey would be, for all of us. The grief and pain that was consuming our lives was so intense that I did not know how we would make it through. My son and I, so much alike, so full of love and so tender hearted. I remember thinking to myself "this is like putting a puppy in with a bunch of Rottweilers." My fear for my son's safety and wellbeing was consuming my every thought. Little did I know there was a bigger plan, a much greater purpose to this tragedy. Indeed our lives are changed forever, but now it is our turn to decide where we wish for this journey to take us, and change us.

I think initially my greatest fear was for Brandon's safety, and secondly if this would change his heart? Would he come home the beautiful, kind young man that was taken away from us in shackles and cuffs 18 months ago? I know I share this same fear with so many mothers. What is truly amazing about this process is what we begin to learn about ourselves and the inner strength that we find, that to survive this, we must be strong and we must find a greater purpose in what is happening. If we don't choose to do that, then truly what purpose was all of this? For Brandon and me, we discovered that we could use our heart and our personal gifts to help others who are walking this same journey.

I have always been very proud of Brandon; he is a superior athlete, once holding records at his schools for a variety of sports, and even as a young teen-ager being scouted by Universities to play football for them. But what I was most proud of Brandon for was his heart, his big huge heart. Brandon, who had studied personal fitness training, now spends his daily free time focusing on maintaining his health by working out and training others in prisons how to do the same. At first, Brandon, being so shy, never could have imagined doing such a thing and it only began because other inmates would watch Brandon's daily workouts and ask him to teach them how to do what he does. There are much worse things that Brandon could be choosing to do with his "time." It is comforting for me to know he is focusing on something positive, and also helping others find a better way to spend their "time." Brandon, who in the past was quite shy and didn't care much for being social, shares with me that he has really "come a long way" and doesn't think twice about that anymore.

It took several months, if not the first year for Brandon to find peace in what had happened. It was like one day he found the strength that he needed to do this- to do his time. Brandon had found his strength, now it was our turn.

I had discovered Oregon CURE through a brochure at the DOC office in Salem. I made my first phone call to CURE and had the opportunity to share our story over the phone with Gretchen, Oregon CURE President. It was so comforting to finally be able to talk to someone who understood the deep, unimaginable pain that I was feeling. Gretchen encouraged me to attend a support group meeting. I remember thinking to myself; "I can't even make it through a phone call without sobbing, how could I possibly go talk to a group of strangers". Gretchen invited me to her support group in Beaverton that week, and I found such comfort that I went that next weekend to Alicia's group in Salem. How wonderful it was to be able to share openly with others about my son's conviction, and not feel judged or ashamed. There are SO MANY questions at first. Not knowing before attending a Cure group where to find those answers even about simple things like phone calls, inmate accounts and visitation processes. For me, it was those opportunities that I took to spend at my CURE group that guided me to the answers I needed and gave me the comfort I so longed for.

I grew stronger and like Brandon, found peace in our tragedy, I wanted to somehow use our experience to help others. Today, I'm honored to host the SE Portland Oregon CURE meetings and find myself giving comfort and a thoughtful ear to others that are walking their painful journey. We may all have a different story or come from different places in life, but we seem to share the same deep, unimaginable pain when our loved one is incarcerated. Through our own experiences, we can reach out to help and comfort others as they go through their journey. Our story has only began... we are only 18 months into our 55 month sentence, but it is my hope whatever we have yet to face, whatever challenges and heartaches lay ahead, that we will find strength to get through it and compassion to use our experiences to help others in their journey. Last week, when the mother of a 22 year old attended my group, walking in the mirrored image of myself 18 months ago, so shattered and devastated, showing me the picture of her son. I was reminded of the beauty that can be found in tragedy. Her son Michael is one of the young men that Brandon has befriended at SRCI and the boys workout together daily. Amazing how out of 3,500 inmates in a prison, these two young men became friends and their mothers found comfort and friendship through an Oregon Cure support group.

Panel Supports Justice Reinvestment Continued from page one

Perhaps in light of research based evidence for effective prevention and rehabilitation programs, the Commission on Public Safety could also include specialists in the areas of human development, alcohol and substance abuse treatment, impulse control, and re-entry skills, such as financial management, job training, employment application and interview techniques, and non violent conflict resolution.

Justice reinvestment gives one hope that it is possible to be smart on sentencing and smart on crime in more cost effective ways - and put our resources into building safer communities.

CRIME AND BIOLOGY

Authors Terrie Moffitt, Stephen Ross and Adrian Raine are researchers examining the relationships between biology (heritability, psycho-physiology, neuroimaging, neurotransmitters, birth complications and hormones) and its relationship to crime. There has been an explosion in ways of thinking about connections between human biology and crime...science has come a long way since our experiences dissecting frogs in high school biology class. Forensic science is basically biological: studying the effects of tasers on heart muscle, the uses of injury patterns to detect child abuse, the application of physical anthropology to crime-scene evidence, and the uses of DNA in offender identification.

Psychobiologists are uncovering biological connections that predict criminal involvement such as intelligence, neuro-cognitive deficits, physical size and strength, hyperactivity, and personality traits like impulsivity and low self-control.

Mental health researchers are looking for biological explanations of the effects of alcohol caused dis-inhibiting violent behavior, and what triggers violent behaviors caused by paranoid delusions and command hallucinations in the mentally ill.

Ethologists (researchers who study animal behavior in their natural environment) have observed that in almost all mammalian species, including man, males begin to seek novelty, search for stimulation, roam afar from family, and engage in risk-taking around the age of reproductive maturity. This phenomenon, called "dispersal," has its origins in a biological imperative to avoid inbreeding and promote genetic variation, thereby enhancing group fitness and survival. Researchers think that dispersal has implications in the high incidence of adolescent crime. Neuroscience is discovering biological explanations for why thinking processes such as risk-appraisal and decision-making differ between adolescents and adults. Health researchers are investigating the effects of crime on biology. There are studies of the effects of domestic violence on the health of women victims, the effects of child abuse on victims' immune systems and physical health as adults, and the damaging effects of life-course persistent offenders' antisocial lifestyle on their health when they reach midlife. Toxicologists and nutritionists are uncovering consequences for crime of childhood exposure to toxins and to deprivation of basic nutrition.

This article is to acquaint the reader to the existence of these areas of research, and to attract readers into their thinking about crime: its causes, consequences, control, and prevention.

Some results of research into the possible biological causes of crime are:

1. There is a marked variation among people in their response to all social causes of crime (poverty, lack of education, single-parent families, etc. which prompts research into biological vulnerability to the social causes of crime.
2. A rule of thumb is biosocial interaction: biological vulnerabilities to crime discussed above need to be considered along with social vulnerabilities such as poverty and lack of education.
3. Many offenders do not have biological vulnerabilities. Biological vulnerabilities are concentrated among individuals whose antisocial behavior onsets in childhood persist for years thereafter, and involves frequent and violent victimization of others.
4. Because it is not ethical to experimentally alter biological risk to test whether antisocial behavior results, the causes remain unclear. However, biological characteristics assessed during childhood in serious studies do predict antisocial behavior in adolescence and adulthood.
5. Crime is concentrated in families. More than 100 twin studies and adoption studies converge to show that approximately half of the variation in antisocial behavior among people is under genetic influence.
6. Genetic studies show association between genetic polymorphisms (subtle, slight change in a gene) and antisocial behavior. The most replicated and validated genetic finding is that the changes in the MAOA gene due to childhood maltreatment is associated with risk for violent crime.
7. The most replicated and validated psycho physiological findings show that antisocial individuals are chronically under-aroused, as shown through slow heart rate, weak skin conductance activity, and excessive slow-wave electroencephalogram readings.
8. The most replicated and validated findings from brain-imaging research show that impaired communication between self-control areas in the brain's frontal lobes and emotional areas in the brain's temporal lobes results in deficient learning from punishment, lack of empathy and remorse, exaggerated reactions to perceived threats, and weak control over impulses, fear, and anger.
9. Legal scholars argue that a defendant's biological characteristics are like any other information that can be considered in court. The question of whether a defendant's biological vulnerability to crime prevents free will and weakens criminal guilt remains much more controversial.
10. Offenders who have lived an antisocial lifestyle for years show early declines in physical health as compared to their age-mates, suggesting that the cost of crime to society involves not only criminal-justice costs, but also health-care costs.

Biological research into addictions, schizophrenia, depression, anxiety, autism, attention-deficit hyperactivity, and dementia is rapidly leading toward a more complete understanding of these problems. Breakthroughs in understanding are in turn rapidly leading toward translation into treatments, and even preventions. In contrast, biological research into antisocial behavior is still very far away from translation to treatment. Research has evidenced that biological vulnerabilities are involved in antisocial behavior, particularly in the lives of individuals who suffer extensive social risks for crime, and whose antisocial behavior onsets in childhood, persists for years thereafter, and involves frequent and violent victimization of others. If research led to treatments that worked, many offenders who recognize that they and their families suffer from the consequences of their violence might prefer treatment, as opposed to the options of harming their loved ones or being imprisoned. Hopefully, as more researchers and criminologists become involved in the study of the biology of crime, new insights and treatments will become available that can provide interventions to life-long criminal behavior.

This article has been challenging since it describes scientific and technical concepts in the rarely discussed field of the biological basis of crime. As a member of Oregon CURE with a son in prison, I am always interested in new trends in the study of criminology. In the next issue of our newsletter, I plan to write about Labor Markets and Crime. James Q. Wilson and Joan Petersilia from Crime and Public Policy edited all these articles.

Holiday Grief by Meredith Wexler

For many people, the holiday time can be a time of great joy-filled with food, presents and sharing time with your loved ones. For others, like many of us, the holiday time can be a very painful and sorrowful time because it is a reminder that there is a loved one not sitting at the holiday table with us. That is why Oregon CURE thought the most perfect speaker for December was Amy Kipp, a Couples and Family Therapist who specializes in grief and loss. I particularly enjoyed her open group participation model, encouraging everyone to share his or her own experiences.

Amy reminded us that people often associate grief with death, but grief can be associated with many things, such as being able to be with a loved one. We miss their physical presence. We miss the dreams that we once had for our youth. We may grieve for the crimes that they have committed or the people that they have harmed along the way.

Amy educated us on Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief:

- 1) Denial
- 2) Anger or Disappointment
- 3) Bargaining or wishing for something else
- 4) Depression, which may include isolating or not being able to do your daily chores
- 5) Acceptance, which may feel like you have reached the stage where you have the tools you need to deal with your situation

The group added other feelings that we feel at this time: shock, guilt or shame, betrayal, cheated by the systems, fear, disappointed in our loved one, or even motivated to do some type of action to make it better.

Amy suggested some great ways to take care of ourselves during this difficult holiday season. First we need to simply take the time to acknowledge that our children are not with us. We can try to get a phone call or visit close to the holiday. We can think about setting up some type of ritual to honor our child during the holiday, like lighting a candle, setting a place at the table or even telling stories about your loved one. It is very important to continue to take care of us by eating right, exercising, reaching out to our support system, and journaling if that helps. Make sure to continue to put energy into your other relationships during this time as well, such as your spouse, friends and other family members. Let them know they are important as well.

Thank you so much Amy for coming to speak to our group. We found it informative, but also comforting. Amy's services include individual counseling, couples counseling and family therapy and can be found on the web at <http://amykippcounseling.com/>.

Support Group Meeting Information Please visit our website www.oregoncure.org for additional information!

New SE Portland Location:

Second Tuesday of the Month! St. Anthony Catholic Church, 3720 SE 79th Ave., Portland. Call Sheri for details (503) 380-0626

Our Support Groups and Facilitators are: Call for Times and Locations. **Additional information is available on our website!!!!**

www.oregoncure.org

Beaverton: Gretchen (503) 350-0236

Eugene: Ken (541) 935-1182

Dave (541) 344-7612

Salem: Alicia (503) 930-0330

Medford: Sam (541) 944-3304

Adelia (541) 772-9680

NE Portland:

Pastor Tellis (503) 422-1154

Wanda (503) 289-8120

SE Portland: Sheri (503) 380-0626

To our many contributors, we THANK YOU for your generosity! We know times are hard. If you've not yet had an opportunity to donate, we welcome any amount you can send! Our entire income is generated from your donations. All of our expenses go towards fulfilling our mission and goals. As you know, our board is comprised of volunteers who contribute countless hours to this organization. Please join us in our advocacy effort.

Home for Good in Oregon

During the early 2000's, the Religious Services team of chaplains, volunteer and support staff realized that inmates needed help to continue developing their spirituality beyond the period of incarceration, and they knew that the churches, synagogues, mosques, etc., of Oregon would help in that process. As a result, this was the beginning of Home for Good in Oregon---the creation of a statewide community and faith-based re-entry project. A minister, pastor or rabbi is responsible for the members of his or her own religious tradition, but chaplains, who tend to work in the armed services, hospitals, hospice programs and prisons, serve all people regardless of their religious tradition. If this model of chaplaincy could work in the prisons, a similar model could work in the community.

During one year of study, it was determined that 52% of Oregon inmates in the system were active in religious and spiritual practice. In addition to this involvement, many of the inmates who are not formally involved in a particular religious service have an active spiritual and prayer life or have direct contact with chaplains through services such as grief counseling, serious illness/death notifications and hospice care. Therefore, the goal of Home for Good in Oregon is to facilitate the continuation of this broad-based, in-prison religious and spiritual involvement upon release in a way that would help offenders further their spiritual growth, desist from crime and make the public safer. Each faith and community group has its own unique language, tradition, teaching, set of pro-social attitudes, beliefs and values, and an already established sense of community, and it can bring these resources to augment, partner with and enhance correctional systems. On the other hand, faith-based organizations, by definition, are neither prepared nor equipped to do the specialized work of holding offenders accountable and preventing recidivism upon release. This means a structured partnership with the justice system is necessary if they are to be of help.

Home for Good in Oregon is divided into eight regions which encompass all 36 Oregon counties. The assigned regional chaplain makes links between all of the community and faith-based organizations in his or her area that are willing to work on issues of community justice and offender re-entry, provides them with training and promotes the coordination of their efforts. Trained volunteer re-entry liaisons work in the release prisons under the supervision of the prison chaplain. They meet with eligible inmates prior to release and help them develop the community and faith-based aspects of their release plans. Re-entry liaisons know or have access to the resources in the community through the community chaplains in each county. They work cooperatively with transition counselors in the institutions and probation and parole officers in the community to help individuals prepare for their reintegration with family and community.

Any prisoner currently in a release institution or scheduled for release within 13 months can request a Home for Good in Oregon application from the prison chaplain. After completing the application, the prisoner mails it to:

Carmen Ortiz
Home for Good in Oregon
2575 Center Street
Salem, OR 97301

All applicants receive information regarding effective community and faith-based resources in the county to which they will be released. A written response from Home for Good in Oregon staff and from the regional or local chaplain provides steps the inmate can take to prepare for release to the community and provides a list of local resources known to the Community Chaplain in the county of release, including both community and faith-based organizations and service providers.

The intent of this level of response is to give each releasing offender at least one known contact in the community to which he/she may turn in need and to encourage additional contacts with the community

Inmates who are eligible for a visit from the Re-Entry Liaison have to meet certain requirements including high ACRS scores indicating medium or high risk and demonstrate that they have participated actively in available programs. If a particular applicant is determined to be appropriate for more in-depth community support or mentoring, those connections are made between the Community Chaplains, Re-Entry liaisons and the inmate prior to release. If the risk level indicates that more intensive support and accountability is needed and appropriate, the inmate may become part of a COSA (Circles of Support and Accountability) Circle. Each Circle is composed of individuals who have received intensive specialized training to prepare them to support high risk offenders while holding them accountable.

A prisoner who is interested in becoming involved with Home for Good in Oregon is not required to belong to a particular religion. However, he or she is expected to participate in the transition-focused chapel programs in the institution and to demonstrate a desire for spiritual guidance. Particularly in today's world, releasing to any community can be a challenge for someone who has been locked up for years. Home for Good in Oregon can also provide support for friends and family.

Dear Reader:

We want to thank you for your contributions that have allowed us to reach out to people in prison and their families and friends on the outside. We operate on an extremely limited budget, of which 90% is attributed to operating costs which include: printing and mailing costs of our newsletter, printing publications, our voice mail system and the rental fee for our post office box. The balance is utilized for administrative costs. Our volunteers give freely of their time, energies, and pay for their own transportation to and from meetings as well as taking vacation time to attend other events!

Your support is appreciated and with it we are able to continue our advocacy work with our lawmakers and the Department of Corrections. Our work is determined by the phone calls we receive from you, the letters we receive from people in prison and on the outside and concerns expressed at our support groups throughout the state.

Oregon CURE is incorporated in Oregon as a non-profit 501(C)3 organization. Your contribution is tax deductible.

Thank you for your support.

Oregon CURE Board of Directors,

Gretchen Vala, President Kris Vala, Vice President Bonnie Nusser, Secretary

Name:

Address:

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Yes – I have a few hours a month and I would like to volunteer! My skills would be well suited for:
Answering Correspondence, Newsletter Articles, Updating CURE Resources, Board of Directors

Name of Person in Prison:

SID #.

Facility:

Would you like to contribute to Oregon CURE? Subscribe to our Oregon CURE Newsletter? Please write to the address below and sent the amount for the contribution type: Inmate (\$3), Individual (\$15), Family (\$25), Organization (\$50), Other (\$\$\$).

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Publication Notice

This newsletter is a publication of Oregon CURE. Oregon CURE is a 501 (c) (3) organization whose goal is to reduce crime through criminal justice reform.

The opinions and statements contained in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Oregon CURE.

Contributions of articles, letters to the editor, notices, etc., are welcome, but may be edited or rejected for space considerations.

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Oregon CURE is an all-volunteer organization. Oregon CURE volunteers typically work at other jobs. Volunteers answer letters.

We appreciate the letters you send and do read them. Oregon CURE is not a service organization. Do not send us any legal documents. We do not offer legal services or provide legal advice.

Letter From the Editor:

Thoughts on Coming Home

The sentence was 70 months. Could it really be over? The letters, phone calls, visits... were they really behind us? His father and I sat outside the prison watching through the door. Could that be him? Time passed. We waited. Men passed through the gate, we smiled and wished them well. Finally, his turn, our turn, I grabbed my son and for an instant couldn't let go, amazing, no tears, not now, rushing to the car. It's over. It's done. Jason is coming home.

I found myself following Jason's every move around the house. I couldn't take my eyes off him; so happy to have him back. We laughed and I relented, gave him some time alone. We talked about the future, looking ahead. We laughed about what was found in stored boxes. I had saved everything. I found myself listening. He was reluctant to speak about his time, still is. I have no idea still what it was really like... a mother's nightmare. How much do I really want to know?

I am so proud of how Jason managed his time while doing his time. Exercise put him in better physical condition than ever. Much of his "before" clothing didn't fit any longer. Somehow Jason came home with a maturity I wouldn't have imagined.

We had joked about not getting a tattoo while inside. I feared infection, the worst. Jason promised and kept his word; within a week of his return he had his first one. Life has since taken on a bit of normalcy. Jason is working and shares a home with his fiancée and a friend. Holidays were spent getting reacquainted with family.

I worry and am saddened he will never have that old carefree smile... maybe, someday.

Stress took its toll on me in many ways. I have a marvelous husband, family and good friends who kept me afloat. Thankfully I found an outlet, and friends, within Oregon CURE. Oregon CURE continues to support families and friends during some of the most difficult times they face. I look forward to my continued role within this organization.

Bonnie Nusser

Your letters are very important to us and we appreciate your input. Although we are not able to respond to each one individually, we do read every letter and base our advocacy work on your concerns.

We are a volunteer organization with a three-member board. Even though our resources are very limited at the present time, we are hopeful to increase our support base and be able to respond personally to your correspondence in the future.