



OREGON CURE

Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants

The mission of Oregon CURE is to support the incarcerated and their families and friends by advocating for effective criminal justice policies and procedures.

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A Newsletter for Incarcerated People and their Families and Friends

P.O. Box 80193, Portland, OR 97280 | (503) 844-9145

PRISON TRANSPARENCY, THE OMBUDSMAN & EQUAL FOOTING

by Scott Spencer-Wolff, Ph.D.

PART I, A NEED FOR PRISON TRANSPARENCY

Transparency is a word bantered about often by prison officials. I wonder if the number of times it comes up in conversations and the reality that prisons are one of the least transparent institutional settings on earth has a connection. Maybe if we talk about it, people will think we are. *Transparency* makes information and actions within the prison system visible and accessible to the public, stakeholders, and connected parties such as friends and family. Transparency can include providing data on the number of inmates, staff, and incidents within the facility and disclosing policies, procedures, and *decision-making* processes.

Transparency is vital in the context of prisons for several reasons. Firstly, it helps to promote accountability and trust between the public and the prison system. Prison officials need to demonstrate their commitment to fairness, impartiality, and *responsible* decision-making by making information readily available. The long history of retaliation against both the incarcerated, on large and small scales, and employees has resulted in the payment of millions of dollars of court awards and paid for ultimately by taxpayers. Transparency is one of the primary responsibilities of a very public and taxpayer-funded agency.

Secondly, transparency can also help to identify and address issues within the prison system. Being a prison employee brings the responsibility to contain the employee's natural tendencies to insert egos into their job. By publishing data on incidents of violence or abuse, prison officials can identify patterns or trends and take steps to address these issues. Both in terms of the *kinds* of incidents and the players *involved* in incidents. Transparency, ideally, would include staff decisions around pseudo-legal disciplinary actions.

While these don't normally amount to criminal proceedings, the reality is that these incidents can affect the amount of time someone spends in prison in terms of sentencing adjustments and parole board hearings - which makes it critically important to be highly visible and not hidden in some murky process of daily institutional life. What was accused in a disciplinary report, *who* accused it, and what were the facts? All aspects of an incident would benefit from some scrutiny to avoid the old "*piss me off, and I'll send you to the hole...*" syndrome, a serious form of abuse of power.

In Oregon now, there are numerous incidents of people being sent to or incarcerated in segregation for reasons that are not at all clear - and when asked about it, prison officials use Sgt. Schultz from Hogan's Heroes famous quote. "I know nozzing." How is that possible? These officials are management. I am thinking in particular of some recent cases with law library clerks, including a couple who had very excellent reputations as helpful (to Adults in Custody). Those require some very careful scrutiny.

PRISON TRANSPARENCY, THE OMBUDSMAN & EQUAL FOOTING (continued)

By disclosing policies and procedures, stakeholders can provide feedback and suggestions for improvement. Stakeholders can get a sense of what's really going on, not just the public "The Department of Corrections takes very seriously..." pronouncements of the PR department, which much of the public is coming less and less to believe. At least some of the public is concerned about how *seriously* the ODOC takes anything outside of maintaining its status quo.

Lastly, transparency can also help improve outcomes for prisoners. By making information on operational, educational, vocational, and rehabilitative programs available, prisoners can make informed decisions about their *own* rehabilitation and reintegration into society. I suspect many would like to know about the difficulty of getting into programs or the general lack of availability of programs, considering the number of potential participants.

Overall, *transparency* by prison officials is a crucial component of a fair, effective, and accountable criminal justice system.

Recently Oregon's governor's office appointed a Corrections Ombudsman - (although with no necessary funding or staff, which pretty clearly, at least to me, shows how "seriously" the State takes prison issues.) This position is designed to balance our prison systems because of the nature of prison and the inadequacy of other means of dealing with the conflicts, grievances, and interpersonal problems inherent in incarceration. The Ombudsman is the logical conclusion of inmate rights established by the prisoner litigation of the 1960s and 1970s.

Whether prisons are intended to be rehabilitative or punitive seems to have no bearing on the view that they are complicated *total institutions* (to use the phrase coined by sociologist Erving Goffman around 1961). For at least 100 years, virtually no one has argued that prisons are fair, efficient, or desirable social institutions.

There are two primary functions of prisons - incarceration of offenders who need, for public safety reasons, to be segregated from society for various periods. This first function works reasonably well. The second function, rehabilitation (or more and more today *habilitation*), is more complex. You can't teach people responsibility by taking away responsibility. For many at a certain emotional and developmental intelligence level, learning comes from watching and mimicking pro-social behavior - not from conscious, cognitive choices.

If the incarcerated are mimicking the behavior of staff, as often as not, we are in big trouble. If the mandate is "cover your ass" and not "do what's right," we are not setting up incarcerated individuals for success, and we are not fostering for staff the kind of workplace culture that engenders a sense of pride and self-worth that could easily be a part of the job of prison professional.

Oregon was big, for a while, on the accountability model - which means that one is responsible for one's behavior. That's an excellent and reasonable concept - except where it's one-sided. The incarcerated are accountable, while the staff are not - unless they get caught. For example, the two recent massive lawsuits, totaling a couple of million dollars, were paid out by the ODOC for sexual harassment of female employees.

And, while we heard about the settlements, the public didn't hear about the discipline or removal of those responsible for ignoring the misogynistic behavior of their supervisees. We didn't hear why the male-dominated prison culture allowed this staff abuse to continue and how it would be addressed. Transparency around this was minimal, although two million dollars of public funds were spent on the incidents.

PRISON TRANSPARENCY, THE OMBUDSMAN & EQUAL FOOTING (continued)

The incarcerated, who often have not had the benefit of enculturation in a family or social setting where accountability is an expectation, are supposed to learn how to behave by the example of staff. Hence the term "correctional officers" and not prison guards. And to be fair, I have known numerous correctional officers who have demonstrated that they are amazing human beings who take their responsibilities seriously in all aspects of the job.

Almost everyone sees prisons as a necessary, however regrettable, element of the criminal justice system. It can even be said that groups sympathetic to both the staff and the inmate points of view agree on the challenges of prisons, especially with the inappropriate infusion of so many mentally ill folks. All agree that there are many problems; the argument is about who is at fault.

Several sources of conflict and discord are inherent in the prison experience and are not the fault of *either* staff or inmates. A functional approach to prison life (I love the term 'microstic community') substantiates this assessment. It supports an argument for some structural components to balance what are seen as natural tendencies of institutions.

In many possible forms, the ombudsman concept is presented as the best response to the need for balance. Prisons are, first and foremost, total institutions, as Erving Goffman has defined them: "... a place of residence and work where a large number of like situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life."

Like the military, monasteries, and some large corporate entities that fall under the *total institutions'* category, an admissions process can be described as a "degradation ceremony." While we think of this most often regarding the incarcerated, staff often experience the same degradation ceremonies in a different context.

Whatever social service mindset a new staff member may have, those instincts are subordinated to the culture of "us and them" or "we're the good guys." If you're not one of us, 'you're the bad guys.' In prison terms, this is the necessary transformation of a convicted felon into an inmate. Or a civilian into a Corrections Officer. None of this happens all at once but requires a process of enculturation and input from already functioning inmates and significant staff members.

Inmates need to learn which behavioral methods are effective for meeting their needs and which ones aren't. The same is true for the staff. A successful degradation process automatically establishes a relationship of opposition in the institution.

There are (inferior) inmates and (superior) staff—each having been indoctrinated into different, although complementary, roles and strategies for goal attainment and each holding to competing values and goals. While there may be countless pages of policies and procedures, those policies and procedures are *always* selectively interpreted or followed. (End of part 1)

Part II, "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely." Will be continued next month. To read the entire series, visit our Facebook page, or email oregoncure@gmail.com. If you are incarcerated and want a full copy of this three-part article, please drop us a note at the address on the newsletter, and we will get one to you.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

FREE REENTRY GUIDE FROM THE EDUCATION JUSTICE PROJECT

Order a free re-entry guide from the Education Justice Project in Illinois. Available in English and Spanish. You can request guides via mail, phone, email, or online form. EJP mails guides to incarcerated people and their families free of cost. Here is the contact information:

Reentry Guide Initiative

EJP

1001 S. Wright St

Champaign, IL 61820

Phone: (217) 300-5150 | Email: reentry@educationjustice.net

A MESSAGE FROM OREGON FEARLESS

Fearless is a safe online space for people who are currently, or have been, on the sex offender registry and their allies. The Oregon group was started in March 2022 by a prior registrant who was inspired by similar groups in other states. The group meets for 90 minutes on the fourth Tuesday of each month on Zoom and is open to anyone over 18 years old. One member facilitates the meeting and maintains a safe and respectful environment. Everyone is encouraged to participate at the level that makes them comfortable, including just listening. It is not a place for legal, mental health, or personal advice although sharing of resources is encouraged. Fearless meetings may include people on the sex offender registry, on post-prison supervision, spouses, adult family members, friends, co-workers and supportive community members. Lawyers, politicians, mental health professionals, medical professionals, business people, educators, and other leaders are welcomed but not in a professional capacity. We are here to support each other and not offer advice. If you, or someone you know, is interested in Oregon Fearless please send an email to s63881768@gmail.com. Let us know your name (first names or aliases are just fine) and preferred pronouns. Please briefly outline the reason for your interest and how you would like to be contacted. Messages are confidential and will be deleted after we have contacted you.

A MESSAGE FROM THE INSIDE OUT NETWORK

For AIC: due to the unique role we play in reentry, we're not able to respond to your requests to connect personally via email. It appears that some of you read the article in the Spring CURE newsletter and then immediately reached out to me (Fred) personally. I checked with ODOC, and they don't want me to respond that way.

INTAKE ORIENTATIONS: DO YOU RECENTLY HAVE A LOVED ONE INCARCERATED AND HAVE TONS OF QUESTIONS? IF SO, WE ARE ABLE TO PROVIDE SOME ANSWERS!

Intake Orientations are co-facilitated by the Oregon Department of Corrections and Oregon CURE. Find out about Oregon's prison system, the intake process, phones, mail, and visiting requirements. There will be opportunities to ask questions and learn how you can get through your loved one's incarceration. These Intake Orientations take place from 7PM till 7:30 PM on the 1st Wednesday of each month via Zoom. Please email for Zoom link prior to meeting. oregoncure@gmail.com or admin@oregoncure.com.

A MESSAGE FROM TARYN SEEKING INTERVIEWEES FOR NEW BOOK

I am looking for people sentenced to LWOP or decades as kids but who are now out (served 15+ years) and want to share their story for a new book on "growing up" in prison.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of individuals who were sentenced to life without the possibility of parole as juveniles or given long mandatory minimum sentences as juveniles, and then were released via parole or commutation from the governor after serving fifteen or more years of their sentences. Essentially, all participants grew up in prison and are now learning to live as adults in the community. Through their lived experiences, others will learn what juveniles experience when facing sentences they struggle to comprehend, what it is like to be a child growing up in adult prison, how aging and maturing is different for such youth, what it was like to face the idea of potential release, how they experienced the transition back to their community, and how they are adjusting to life on the outside now.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A MESSAGE FROM TARYN SEEKING INTERVIEWEES FOR NEW BOOK (continued)

These lessons are valuable for legislators, prosecutors, judges, law enforcement, corrections, educators, and others who interact with youth or adults with related or similar risks or experiences to understand better how to prevent, intervene, and help.

Please contact Taryn VanderPyl if interested at vanderpylt@mail.wou.edu or text 602-320-8401. The interview can be done over zoom or I can provide a list of questions to answer in writing.

HERE IS CONTACT INFORMATION FOR OREGON'S OMBUDSMAN

Below is the hotline number, email, and USPS mailing address for anyone that has an issue regarding ODOC that you wish to bring to the attention of our ombudsman. Please bring accurate and credible information and not rumors. Thank you. Here is the contact information:

Adrian Wulff

Department of Corrections Ombuds

Office of Governor Tina Kotek

900 Court St. NE Ste 254

Salem, OR 97301-4047

Phone: (833) 685-0842 | Email: Adrian.WULFF@oregon.gov

DID YOU KNOW OREGON CURE HAS A FACEBOOK GROUP?

[facebook.com/groups/oregoncure](https://www.facebook.com/groups/oregoncure)

Join us for ✓ Great Articles ✓ Up-to-Date Info ✓ Forum for Questions ✓ Info on Monthly Zoom Support Meetings ✓ AND much more. We'd love to see you there.

HAVE YOU VISITED OUR WEBSITE?

Please do, you will find lots of helpful information as well as our past newsletters. <https://oregoncure.org>

SHOP AND SUPPORT OREGON CURE

You can benefit Oregon CURE when you shop at any Kroger/Fred Meyer Store. Simply sign up at Kroger.com. link your shopper's card if you already have one or sign up for one and choose Oregon CURE as the organization you wish to benefit from your shopping with each transaction. Once you sign up, any transaction you make moving forward using your membership Shoppers Card number will benefit Oregon CURE at no expense to you. Kroger will donate a percentage of what you spend with them to Oregon CURE. What a great way to benefit our non-profit.

SUPPORT US IN OTHER WAYS

Oregon Cure appreciates your donations and support. Click to see the full QR code and scan to go directly to our PayPal link.



HOW DOES YOUR DONATION HELP?

It pays for our phone service, post office box, and postage to correspond with those who write to us, both in the free world and the incarcerated, it pays to print and mail our newsletters, and it pays for our non-profit status.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Please contact your legislators about issues that are important to you. Find your legislators at www.oregonlegislature.gov. Contact your legislative representative and make your concerns known to them today!

RESULTS | 2023 LEGISLATIVE BILLS | WE WE'RE WATCHING!

In Part due to the six week long walk out by Republicans in the Oregon Senate, many bills died in committee, including 8 of the ones we were watching. There is the belief that most if not all of them will be resurrected when the Legislature convenes again in January for the short session.

Here is the rundown.

HB 2676: Crime Victims Compensation Reform would allow more crime survivors and their families to access healing and recover services that are currently unavailable.

PASSED & WAITING FOR GOVERNOR TO SIGN AND BECOME LAW.

SB 581: Consistent parole and probation for people who are on parole, probation, and post-prison supervision. Allows that those whose crimes are eligible and who are successfully meeting their supervision goals earn up to a 50% reduction in their sentence, regardless of when they were convicted.

THIS PASSED AND GOES IN TO EFFECT ON JANUARY 1, 2024.

SB 320: Provides persons sentenced to mandatory minimum under Ballot Measure 11 (1994), for crime other than murder, who has not been previously sentenced under measure is eligible for reduction in sentence for appropriate institutional behavior and participation in certain programming unless otherwise ordered by court for substantial and compelling reasons.

DIED IN SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE.

SB 413: Would Support the public defense workforce.

DIED IN WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE.

SB 520: Would help ODOC incarcerated that are sick or dying an opportunity to be safely and humanely released to get the care they need at home with their loved ones.

DIED IN WAYS AND MEANS.

SB 579: Would Guarantee the Right to Vote to incarcerated individuals.

DID NOT MAKE IT OUT OF THE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE.

SB 817: Would allow people accused of low-level crimes a pathway to take responsibility and work toward dismissal through community service and or counseling.

DIED IN JUDICIARY COMMITTEE.

SB 1070: This bill will allow for more just sentencing for survivors of domestic violence who become criminal defendants by virtue of the abuse they suffered and take a significant step toward much needed care and support for incarcerated survivors.

DIED IN COMMITTEE.

HB 2467: Establishes Public Defense Services Student Loan Repayment Assistance Program in Oregon State Bar to provide forgivable loans to eligible public defense attorneys for outstanding student loans.

DIED IN WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE.

HB 2890: Directs Corrections Ombudsman to support Department of Corrections' continuous quality improvement efforts, and to provide report to Governor and committees or interim committees of Legislative Assembly detailing staffing and resources needed to fulfill powers and duties of office within six months of appointment of ombudsman.

DIED IN WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Your membership renewal date is on the address label of this newsletter. If your renewal date is expired, we ask that you please renew today to continue to receive this newsletter and to continue to support our organization.

You can also make a donation for someone you know to become a member. Your support is important to our mission and your donation is tax-deductible.

Send your membership tax-deductible donation to Oregon CURE, PO Box 80193, Portland, OR 97280.

Please fill out the member donation form below to receive our newsletter. Adult in custody subscription donation is \$3 and Individual Non-Incarcerated subscription donation is \$15. **All tax-deductible donations are greatly appreciated and can be made in any amount. Visit our website at oregoncure.com.**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____
(optional)

City/State/Zip: _____

Name of incarcerated loved one / SID & facility: _____

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 opinion 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. Articles may be copied in their entirety with credit to the author or to the publication. Oregon CURE is an all-volunteer organization that is not a service organization. Do not send us any legal documents, we are not a legal service. We are not qualified to assist you with legal matters.

RELEASE ORIENTATIONS

Release Orientations are co-facilitated by Community Corrections and Oregon CURE. Find out how you can help your recently or soon-to-be-released loved one successfully re-enter our communities. Before attending, please phone one of the county coordinators' departments listed below to confirm the date, time, and location.

Washington County

Contact: Michelle Scholl (503) 846-3455

Marion County

Contact: Austin Herman (503) 540-8043

INTAKE ORIENTATIONS

Intake Orientations are co-facilitated by the Oregon Department of Corrections and Oregon CURE. Find out about Oregon's prison system, the intake process, phones, mail, and visiting requirements. There will be opportunities to ask questions and learn how you can get through your loved one's incarceration. Please email for Zoom link prior to meeting:
oregoncure@gmail.com or admin@oregoncure.com

7PM-7:30PM First Wednesdays via Zoom

Portland Metro

Location: Varies - please call Oregon CURE to confirm:
(503) 844-9145 or email oregoncure@gmail.com

Oregon CURE
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PO Box 80193
Portland, OR 97280

ATTENTION:

Your address label has printed your renewal-date, below your name. This will be your last newsletter if your renewal date has passed. **Renew today to remain informed!**



SUPPORT GROUPS

Oregon CURE support groups are intended for adult family members and friends only. Some topics of discussion may not be suitable for small children or pre-teens. Attend a support group and network with family members who have “been there”.

Some of these support groups meet via zoom and some meet in person. Please reach out with the contact information given below as you are planning to attend, or if you have any questions. There is no limit to which of or how often you attend a support group, nor is there a location requirement, if you are interested in attending a support group, we welcome you to do so.

Each meeting offers different insights and valuable information, and you are not required to share anything it all, if you do not wish to, simply listen and learn from other attendees.

Portland East Side Support Group

Varies & flexible – please call if interested.

Please call Ray at (503) 421-0269.

RayAllenFox@gmail.com

Eugene Support Groups

1st Thursdays: 6:30-8:30pm

Please call to confirm location.

Dave (541) 344-7612 or Don (541) 521-2231

Zoom Support Group

1st Wednesdays: 7:00-8:30pm

Please email for Zoom link prior to meeting.

oregoncure@gmail.com or admin@oregoncure.com

Salem Support Group

1st Saturdays: 9:30-11:30am

The Keizer Senior Center

930 Plymouth Drive NE, Keizer, OR 97303

Wayne (503) 409-3329