

SECOND CHANCES SABBATH 2020

RESOURCE GUIDE FOR PASTORS AND WORSHIP LEADERS

HEARING THE CRIES: HEALING JUSTICE



WHAT IS SECOND CHANCES SABBATH?

Second Chances Sabbath is a day in the life of your faith community dedicated to compassion for everyone impacted by the criminal justice system: offenders, victims of crime, legal and corrections staff, law enforcement, and the families of all these people.

We invite you to make space for people impacted by the criminal justice system - in your hearts and in your schedule. Dedicate a day of your community's life together to think about, pray about, learn about, and act for the people with lived experience of our justice system.

This resource guide provides ideas for worship, teaching, and action. Faith leaders, Spiritual Directors, teachers, education groups, and individuals: please read and use this guide in your community, to learn and act for justice. This guide is also available online at www.CoSAOregon.org

WHEN IS SECOND CHANCES SABBATH?

You are invited to join communities across Oregon in recognizing Second Chances Sabbath during the weekend of **April 24-26, 2020**, on whichever day of the week your congregation marks as sacred. April is known as "Second Chances Month" nationwide. You can join other groups across the state and country in remembering the ways we are connected through - and in spite of - our criminal justice system.

If you cannot hold your Second Chances Sabbath during that time, choose another date and let us know. And if you are not part of a group that is able to recognize a Second Chances Sabbath, then commit to spend a day learning and taking action for justice - for example, invite a friend over to watch a documentary about mass incarceration, talk about how it impacts you, and then write letters to your local representatives in Salem.

WHY HOLD TALK ABOUT CRIMINAL JUSTICE IN WORSHIP?

While it feels like the criminal justice system operates on the margins of society, many people are impacted by it: persons in jails and prisons and on probation; staff in correctional facilities, law enforcement, and the judicial system; victims of crime and violence; communities impacted by crime and by disproportionate incarceration; family members with loved ones in prison. It's a good bet that your faith community might already have members with criminal records or who have loved ones who are incarcerated - even if they might not feel comfortable sharing that fact.

Further, from racism to a strained mental healthcare system, to the prison-industrial complex, we are all impacted by mass incarceration. Every taxpayer and voter is taking part in shaping a society that decides which actions are deemed right or wrong, and which groups of people are treated as criminals (and which are deemed "too big" to fail or jail). Who we condemn, and who we scapegoat for collective sins, shape our entire social order.

But there is great hope in this moment: criminal justice reform is a concern across party lines. This is a special moment to come together and take positive steps and take a new look at our justice system. **This is time for society to have a second chance** and start making amends to those our system has harmed.

Holding a Second Chances Sabbath in your community means calling attention to deep-seated issues of justice. It can move your community from concern to compassion for the individuals who work, serve, live, and die within prison walls.

When we remember, we are also connected to one another, bound across the walls between us.

HOW CAN I MAKE A SECOND CHANCES SABBATH HAPPEN?

1. Talk with your faith community leadership about how you all can recognize Second Chances Sabbath within the course of your congregation's life together. There's no one right way to have a Second Chances Sabbath!
2. Tell EMO you're holding a Second Chances Sabbath by emailing cosa@emoregon.org. If you can't join us in April, pick another date that works for your group and let us know when that is.
3. Read this guide and start planning. This guide and past years' Sabbath Resource Guides are also available at our website, with our Second Chances Sabbath bulletin insert: www.CoSAOregon.org.

WHERE DID SECOND CHANCES SABBATH COME FROM?

For five years, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon and the Prison Ministry Commission of the Episcopal Diocese of Oregon have partnered to offer worship resources for religious congregations to take part in a Criminal Justice Sabbath. For this sixth year, we are shifting our theme to "Second Chances." Nationwide, April is Second Chances Month, which offers a natural time to bring this theme to our religious communities. We were heartened last year, when an Illinois-based group contacted us to use some of our Criminal Justice Sabbath resources to seed a similar day among their network. This year, in the spirit of partnership, we will hold our Second Chances Sabbath in April, knowing that not only across Oregon but across the country, people of faith are remembering our neighbors in the justice system.

WHY SECOND CHANCES MATTER

PRISON FELLOWSHIP ESTIMATES THAT **65-70 MILLION ADULTS** IN THE UNITED STATES HAVE A CRIMINAL RECORD.

...that's almost 1 in 3 adults.

BARRIERS REMAIN

long after someone leaves prison:

- *Housing*
- *Employment*
- *Education*
- *Licensing*
- *Public Benefits*
- *Parental Rights*

When someone comes home from prison, wider society expects them to make better choices than before they were incarcerated. But as a society, we don't make that easy. Even after serving time, a criminal record creates barriers to integration, making it hard to find safe housing, jobs, treatment, and social connection. Stereotypes and stigmas label people.

People of faith have an important role to play in rejecting stereotypes that keep people in a "second prison" after release. Start by checking your own assumptions about people with criminal histories, then start reaching out to help.

You can be especially valuable in helping break down the loneliness that people sometimes face during reentry. Isolation isn't good for any of us, and our faith communities can be important places to help someone feel like they belong.

YOU CAN HELP

YOU CAN GIVE SOMEONE A SECOND CHANCE:

HIRE someone for a job, even if they have a criminal record.

RENT to someone who has a record.

MENTOR someone coming home from prison.

HOST a recovery group at your house of worship.

HOLD a special meditation, prayer, or study group for persons with records. Adults-only spiritual groups are especially rare and valuable for people with supervision restrictions that mean they can't be around minors.

SECOND CHANCES ARE FOR EVERYONE

April is Second Chances Month nationwide, a time to remember the healing and redemption that is possible after crime. It's a time to remember the challenges society places before people coming home from prison - and the truth that each of us deserves a second chance, even after serving time.

But second chances aren't just about the legal system or people who've been to prison. Second chances are what the walk of faith is all about.

SECOND CHANCES ARE ALL AROUND US

Snakes shed their skin as they grow, slithering out from one layer so that the new one can shine.

The nautilus develops new rooms in its shell, moving out from one small room into the next once the old room is too small. Growth requires this change. Yet during the time of transition from the old room to the new, the creature is uniquely vulnerable to attack. To remain is to perish, and to grow is to risk perishing. But life calls them out of their shells nonetheless.

A tiny caterpillar eats and munches along its way until its time comes to enter into a cocoon, in which it will grow for weeks. At the end of that time, the new butterfly emerges, ready to take flight for the first time.

Change, transformation, transition, new life... second chances.

SECOND CHANCES ARE PART OF FAITH

If nature doesn't give enough examples of this, our sacred stories provide ample material.

For example, for Christians in Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions, our Second Chances Sabbath falls on the Third Week of Easter, during which

churches that follow the Revised Common Lectionary read a story from Luke (24:13-35) when the resurrected Jesus meets some of his disciples, walks with them, and reveals himself to their surprised faces. He reveals himself less in how he appears, and more in what he says - telling the renewed story of their people - and in what he does - sharing in a familiar ritual of broken bread. It is in hearing and in enacting the rite that the disciples are able to have their eyes opened.

What is the Resurrection, but a second chance for Jesus' followers to understand what his ministry meant? It wasn't Jesus who needed to return, it was his followers who needed another chance.

SECOND CHANCES ARE FOR EVERYONE

People who have committed crimes are deemed some of the most disposable people in our society. Both in physical treatment and in the symbolic ways they are spoken of and for, the label of "criminal" is used to remove a portion of someone's humanity.

But if second chances to mean anything for anyone, they must extend to even people who have caused harm to others. At the root of "second chances" is the belief in the power of change for the better.

SECOND CHANCES NEED COMMUNITY

On one level, it is the community that allows someone to have a second chance. If a community is unable to change their idea of me, however much I might have changed inside, my change is not seen and validated. I'm still stuck.

On another level, a community of care is prerequisite to enable an individual to change. The changes required of me in my second chance entail a community to support me through the challenges,

and to hold me accountable to this new self. It requires companions on the journey.

RELIGION NEEDS SECOND CHANCES

Transformation – a second chance – is a vital religious theme.

Yet, how often is their house of worship the place where people experience the most profound life transformation? Sometimes it is. For many worshippers, it is not, however hard their spiritual leaders might try!



As my mentor Deacon Tom English points out, the reverse is true when we come to the justice system. In jails and prisons, transformation is a common experience. It is, perhaps, the very point of a ‘correctional’ institution: to change someone in deep, lasting ways. During incarceration and after release, people face an urgent need to contemplate and commit to personal transformation. Second chances are not abstract but necessary for survival.

What, then, do religious communities have to **learn** from people who have been incarcerated about the powerful spiritual theme of transformation? How else will we learn what we mean by the words we pray and sing, if we don’t listen to the stories of our neighbors who have lived them?

A WORD ABOUT THE THEOLOGY OF SECOND CHANCES – PART II

SECOND CHANCES ARE NOT EASY, BUT THEY’RE WORTH IT

VICTIMS DESERVE SECOND CHANCES

People who have survived crime and violence deserve and need second chances as well.

We deserve to know that we are worthy. We deserve to have our story heard and believed. We deserve information about what happened to us.

We deserve safety to know we can start again. We deserve to know that our experience may have changed something, so that what happened to us won’t happen to anyone else again, including us.

SECOND CHANCES ARE ABOUT TRUST

Second chances are about rebuilding a new life, after a rupture that makes me take stock of who I am. If I’ve harmed someone, a second chance is

about working to restore some of the trust that I lost by my actions. If I’ve suffered harm, it’s about finding my bearing to know where and how I can trust again, slowly, step by step.

SECOND CHANCES LOOK BACK

Second chances may be offered too soon. Restorative justice, along with religious traditions of forgiveness, teach us that a second chance is only a truly new chance once someone has faced what they’ve done, and is committed to change.

Unless I make amends for the harms I have caused, acknowledge my actions honestly, and commit to change, it isn’t a second chance. It’s continuation of the harm.

Until I process everything I went through, I'm still stuck in the traumatic narratives from before. I need freedom to start again, by facing where I've been - when I'm ready to do that.

SECOND CHANCES LOOK DIFFERENT THAN THE FIRST

If someone thinks they should get the same access and opportunities as before, they may not be ready for a second chance. Accountability will change what I can safely do and the roles I can play. I'm still getting a second chance - just in a different way than the life I had before.

When a boss extorts from her company, gets caught, then expects to be handed the controls again, she does not understand that her second chance will not look like the first.

Grief about this is natural. It can be painful, to be unable to live the life I used to and want to. That's why I need a community of support around me to process this change and grieve with me.

Experiences of harm - crime, violence, trauma - change us and change the world. They close some doors - that's why we want to prevent them. The hopeful step forward is in knowing that we can choose changes that make us better people, deserving of a second chance.

SECOND CHANCES TAKE WORK

Real second chances are earned. There is work of transformation needed before a community can extend a second chance. This isn't because the

community should continue punishment - it's because a community deserves to feel safe, and someone who has harmed members of the community has lost some trust.



Important note: The very message of this day - that we all deserve second chances - can become weaponized if taken as a blanket statement to absolve responsibility. Please know that a community does not have a greater obligation to extend a second chance than an individual has to earn one.

When a comedian is revealed for his sexually inappropriate behavior, then goes on tour mocking his accusers, he is not ready for a second chance.

Mary Zinkin, Ph.D., a Buddhist Chaplain and Executive Director of Center for Trauma Support Services, describes what true accountability may look like for someone who caused harm:

- 1) acknowledge the harm
- 2) fully own it
- 3) express remorse
- 4) repair the harm with the victim/survivor
- 5) commit to never do it again

This lays out a vision of what a real "second chance" entails. It's not easy, but it's worth it.

Rev. Audrey Zunkel-deCoursey has managed EMO's criminal justice program for six years. She previously served as a pastor and chaplain.

INSPIRATION

ON FACING HARM

FROM PROVERBS OF ASHES:

VIOLENCE, REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING, AND THE SEARCH FOR WHAT SAVES US

BY RITA NAKASHIMA BROCK AND REBECCA ANN PARKER

"Theology needs to teach us how to be for ourselves and be for others simultaneously, to hold both lives sacred. If either life is being exploited or injured by the relationship, there should be action that will restore ethical relationship and redress the harm. Only then will our concern extend equally to victims and to victimizers..."

"Theology needs to tend to the healing of those whose lives have been fragmented by violence. The survivor needs healing, not just to change the system, but so she herself can become free.

"Theologians may say that the suffering of victims helps heal the world, but who will heal the suffering victims? Who will take the crucified down from the cross and grieve? How will their lives be restored or redeemed, their bitter anguish salved?"

THE POWER OF SHOWING LOVE

FROM GRACE GOES TO PRISON

BY MELANIE G. SNYDER

Marie Hamilton started volunteering in the prisons of Pennsylvania. As the volunteer program she started evolved, she had a tremendous impact on many people's lives, as shown by this letter from one person she met inside prison. It is a reminder of how radical the simple act of a positive relationship can be.

"There are many of us who have never had anyone to care about us the way that you do. It is very hard for us to understand - some of us say 'Why? Why are they doing this for us?' To see and feel real love and concern sometimes is a hard thing to accept when you have never had it before. Some of us are frightened to open up because the love and concern has always been taken away and the only thing that is left is the hurt of how it was - so we close off and say 'I don't want to be hurt again' or 'I will push them away so that they can't hurt me, if they don't like me, they can't hurt me.' But we are learning because of this program and your organization/ Thank you for caring about us and thank you for being concerned about what happens to us."

3 EXAMPLES FROM BARB TOEWS, THE LITTLE BOOK OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE FOR PEOPLE IN PRISON¹

1) One night in 1974, two young men vandalized 22 homes, cars, and business. At the request of the probation officer and his colleague, the judge ordered the men to meet with their victims. The men began to knock on the victims' doors, stating who they were and asking what they owed for the damages. One victim was ready to punch the men. Another invited them in for tea. Within three months the men paid back all their victims. These men participated in the first documented face-to-face victim offender meetings ordered by a [US] court.

Decades later, one of these men, Russ, was studying law and security at a local college. A guest speaker talked about a local celebrated case that inspired a restorative-justice movement. Russ realized they were talking about him! ... Russ later became a volunteer mediator with the program.

2) Members of a community heard that a transition house for sex offenders was opening in their neighborhood. Expecting opposition, a concerned citizen suggested holding a Talking Circle. After careful preparation, about 70 community members and house residents attended... Circle members talked about times when they were hurt by others, did something wrong, or felt unworthy.

Their conversation then turned to their concerns about having the home in the neighborhood. A few community members talked about personal experiences with sexual abuse. Without excusing their crimes, several of the offenders spoke to similar experiences. The Circle decided to accept the home and created a plan that worked for everyone. All new house residents were introduced around the neighborhood. Later, when the city decided to move the house elsewhere, the community fought to keep it.

3) Meeting over nine weeks, a group of incarcerated women sit in a Circle on a journey toward healing. To be part of this Circle, the women have accepted responsibility for their crimes and are prepared to talk openly about it with the other Circle members. It is not easy and many doubt that they can do it. Yet, using a talking piece, each woman speaks to her crime experience. She considers what her victim may want to say to her and what she would like to say in return.

The women explore together experiences with personal change, healing, and kindness, sharing in ways they have never done before. They find themselves rebuilding relationships and apologizing for past conflicts with each other. The women, some initially doubters, agreed that the Circle was one of the best things to happen to them.

¹ Stories written by Barb Toews, "The Little Book of Restorative Justice for People in Prison: Rebuilding the Web of Relationships," (Good Books: Intercourse PA, 2006) pp 9, 15, 71.

RESTORING THE COMMUNITY TO JUSTICE-MAKING

REV. AUDREY ZUNKEL-DECOURSEY

Over the course of working with people coming home from prison, survivors of violence, and people of faith, I have learned a few things about how deeply restorative justice issues is interconnected with our faith life.

Restorative Justice (RJ) is a movement and a philosophy, which poses an alternative to the standard, punitive model of justice in our legal system. Where traditional justice seeks to identify who committed the crime and how they should be punished, restorative justice seeks to identify who all was harmed (which may include the perpetrator), what healing each party needs, and how that healing can be advanced collectively. It also seeks to prevent harm and violence proactively.

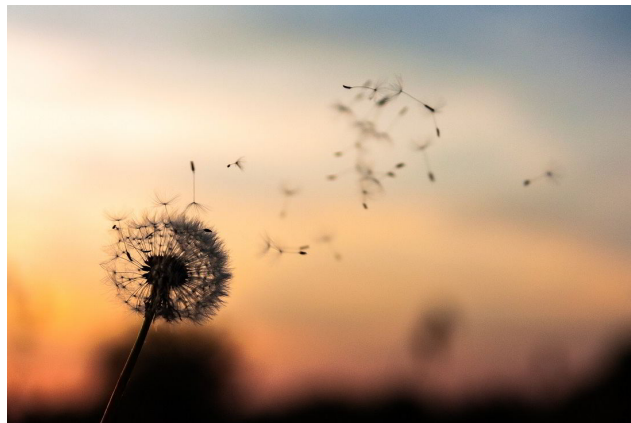
RJ identifies three parties involved when harm ruptures a relationship:

- Victim
- Offender
- Community

Each has a role to play.

These labels become complex, though, because often one person has been in all three roles. Many people who go to prison, even for very harmful crimes, are also victimized by the prison system.

In traditional justice models, the community is involved through the professionalized fields of law enforcement, court system, and corrections. Restorative justice, however, calls community to take a more active, personal role in helping restore justice and support healing – and a pro-active role in preventing harm.



However, even in RJ practice, the role of *Community* is too often overlooked. This is where people of faith have a unique opportunity for mutual benefit with the RJ movement.

In religious congregations, we know that people are more than their labels. One “label” we may wear is the identity of our spiritual tradition, whether chosen or inherited. When we enter our house of worship, this label overlays all the other

labels we wear, labels defined by our professional, civic, and familial roles.

The labels of “victim” and “offender” likewise can coexist in the same person, and certainly co-exist in a congregation.

Our congregations might have people who practice law and

people with felony records. They might have people who have survived domestic violence and people who volunteer inside prisons. Somehow, we are all community together. It isn’t easy!

How we form community among people across our labels is a model *of* and *for* restorative justice. If we do this poorly, our communities can be perpetuating harm without even knowing it. This life-long challenge of forming safe, supportive, accountable community allows for mutual learning with our RJ partners.

COMMUNITY PLAYS MANY ROLES

When we look at a specific incident of harm, there are several ways community can play a role in Restoring Justice after an incident of harm. Some are helpful, and some are less so. But we can no longer pretend that crime and violence happens to “someone else” or that we can leave it to the professionals to deal with. We are part of it, whether we see that or not.

WITNESS. People of faith are called, foremost, to this sacred duty. Not as witnesses for the courts, but as witnesses to the truth of human experience. Martyrs have been prominent figures for the People of the Book, and “martyr” means *witness*. This is a powerful role to play even in our age. Witnessing the pain of someone’s trauma requires deep skill and spiritual grounding, to listen without seeking to fix them, insert oneself, minimize, or distract from it. Witnessing may be one of the most important goals of our spiritual practice: to learn how to be fully present, even to each other’s pain; to learn how to grieve. Witnessing entails being moved, and joining in movement for justice and healing.

BYSTANDER. If we aren’t paying attention, though, we may fail to be a Witness and instead become a Bystander. If we don’t try to prepare ourselves, we can become mere bystanders, gawking at the damage without helping. We degrade or exploit someone’s pain. We numb ourselves to the horrors, making ourselves feel good by scapegoating others, or by pretending we have avoided suffering violence because of our own superior choices.

FIRST RESPONDER. Not just to physical needs, but to emotional ones. When we are the first people to hear someone’s story of a traumatic event, we have the opportunity to help healing. We are entrusted with a sacred gift, to listen and believe someone’s story, and to help them seek healing resources beyond us. Community can also help interrupt patterns of family violence by paying attention to children, elders, and any vulnerable people, and offering them space to seek help.

PEOPLE’S HISTORIAN. Extending from our role as witnesses, we will become people who tell the story. How we tell these stories, and whose stories we tell, matters. Is our “big story” – the story of faith – shaped by the individual stories of our people? Or does it ignore inconvenient realities, to advance an ideology or agenda? When possible, do we lift up the voices of those directly involved?

PREVENTION SPECIALIST. One of the most important duties community can fulfill is in building strong relationships that instill resilience in young people to help them cope with traumas that come their way. They can help hold people of all ages in compassionate care, reducing the temptation of anti-social and violent activities. They can role model healthy boundaries and relationships of mutuality.

There are deeper levels of the community’s involvement in harm and in restoring healing. Sometimes community is not just the community:

COMMUNITY AS VICTIM. After a crime, a community may feel the effects. We may feel less safe in our homes or schools or houses of worship. Crime has secondary impacts on wider society.

Communities are also hurt by mass incarceration. Families lose loved ones. Economic providers are absent. Remaining family members shoulder more work in caring for children. Traditions cannot be passed down.

COMMUNITY AS OFFENDER. Society at large has perpetrated policies of mass incarceration, harming millions. By choosing to respond to problems and conflict with a criminal approach, instead of a public health or a restorative justice approach, we are helping create a system that sustains a racial hierarchy and drains our communities of the behavioral health resources we need.

COMMUNITIES OF FAITH HAVE HARMED. Religious communities and traditions have harmed many, many people. There is no way to honestly practice our faith that doesn't admit that fact. Sadly, no religious tradition has a pure history, and in places around the world people use their religion to justify violence. This does not mean all religion is inherently bad. It means it is embodied by humans, who have the capacity to turn creations toward life or toward violence.

As a Christian, I frequently want to shout, *"Not all Christians are like that!"* in response to any number of things other Christians do, or to assumptions non-Christians make. But I am still part of a body with responsibility for the harms any part of it have caused. I am part of a tradition that adopted too much of Roman imperial culture, and has preserved it to this day.

As a member of this body, I also face the ways the church has hurt me. Restorative Justice affirms that my suffering of harm from this institution matters beyond me. And I am not alone. Many of the people hurt by Christianity are members of the Church.

On subtler levels, faith communities may reiterate unhealthy patterns, in ways large and small. The call to serve in criminal justice ministries is at its heart a call to spiritually assess *ourselves*: are we are healthy enough to be models and supports to others? Strong justice ministries push us to be better at living our values.

What this all means is that faith traditions need Restorative Justice as much as anyone, and it can inform our beliefs and practice. What does it mean to "confess" our faith... not just as claiming an identity, but in wrestling with the magnitude of the culpability we share in when we are someone co-creating a tradition that has caused harm?

A ROLE FOR COMMUNITY

"Our prevailing adversarial system is based upon a Roman notion of justice... Causing someone to suffer creates an imbalance in the scales of justice, and the way to rebalance the scales and do justice is to cause the responsible person to suffer; we respond to the original harm with a second harm. **Ours is a system that harms people who harm people, presumably to show that harming people is wrong.**

"This sets into motion endless cycles of harm. Restorative justice seeks to interrupt these cycles by repairing the damage done to relationships in the wake of crime or other wrongdoing, and do so in a way that is consonant with indigenous wisdom – Africa's and that of other traditions. **Justice is a healing ground, not a battleground.**"

"Indeed, in the African worldview, when something happens to one, whether blessing or burden, it happens to all... In the wake of harm, making it right is not solely the responsibility of the individuals directly involved; it is also the responsibility of communities... African indigenous justice seeks to strengthen relationship by fashioning win-win outcomes."

Read more from the prophetic Restorative Justice leader Fania E. Davis in "The Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice: Black Lives, Healing, and US Social Transformation" (Good Books: New York, 2019, p. 24-25).

HOPE FOR OREGON






JUSTICE REINVESTMENT

Oregon is on the right path toward advancing better solutions for our justice system. Justice Reinvestment has helped Oregon prioritize spending for victim services, community supervision, addiction and mental health treatment, and other solutions to root causes. This has saved us the expense of opening two prisons – along with sparing thousands of Oregonians and their families from the trauma of incarceration.

Since 2013, Oregon has consistently supported public safety policies that flatline corrections growth, invest in communities, expand survivor services, and are in line with our values:

- Keep families together
- Invest in survivors' healing
- Expand local and community based services
- Promote equity
- Safely reduce prison use

In recent legislative sessions, our elected leaders have passed important bills to keep Justice Reinvestment strong, expanding sentence reforms that helped keep the second women's prison from opening and infusing more racial equity into the process.

-  **ACCOUNTABILITY** such as supervision and local sanctions, risk assessments, and evidence-based tools used to develop appropriate plans for public safety.
-  **HOUSING AND TRANSITION SERVICES** for people coming out of prison or jail, including services like release planning, housing, and community referrals.
-  **TREATMENT** programs that can include addiction, mental health, and cognitive behavior treatment, including treatment in jail.
-  **10% FOR VICTIM SERVICES** for crime survivors, including domestic and sexual violence and for children who have been abused or neglected.
-  **FAMILY SUPPORT AND SKILL BUILDING**, which can include employment assistance, education, parenting classes, and mentoring.

* Programs and services reflect the 2017-2019 biennium.



BY THE END OF THE 2021-23 BIENNIUM, JUSTICE REINVESTMENT IS PROJECTED TO
SAVE OREGON OVER \$527 MILLION.

JRI lists and images by Partnership for Safety and Justice

TAKE ACTION

KNOW YOUR D.A.

One of the most powerful – but least understood – roles in our justice system is the District Attorney (D.A.). Each county elects one D.A. who manages a team of prosecutors, the lawyers who take over a person's case after police arrest them. The D.A. and their staff wield considerable power in deciding what charges to press, what plea deals to offer, and what sentences to request.

Many D.A.s run unopposed for multiple terms. When their seats open up, or they do get a challenger, voters rarely hear much about the candidates or know how to assess which ones support their values.

One of the most important decisions you make when you vote is in your choice for D.A. If you have a competitive ballot, research your D.A. candidates. Contact your local advocacy groups or a statewide group like Safety and Justice Oregon to learn about candidates' positions on issues you care about.