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Community service is valuable in rehabilitating offenders

SB 360 requires establishing service exchange programs for supervised individuals

SALEM – Community service can be the most powerful way for those who have served prison sentences re-integrate into society.

The Oregon Senate recognized this today by voting to pass a bill requiring establishing such options for those serving parole or post-prison supervision. Senate Bill 360 – which passed the Senate on a 30-0 vote – directs each county to establish a program for those who have served a sentence with the Oregon Department of Corrections to fulfill community service to “work off” their debts for court, attorney or supervision fees.

“Senate Bill 360 directs each county to establish a community service exchange program for individuals to perform community service in lieu of payment of delinquent fees for debts or fees for supervision,” said Sen. Lew Frederick (D-Portland), who carried the bill in the Senate. “Currently, offenders on parole or post-prison supervision are required to pay a fixed fee to counties that is intended to cover the costs of supervision, but those fees can be reduced or modified by the county.”

Typically, these fees are paid by the offender. They still must make monetary payment for restitution for damages to any victims, compensatory fines or other items that are prohibited by statute from being included. The bill garnered widespread support from advocates who work with people under post-prison supervision, as well as the Oregon Association of Community Corrections Directors and the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs.

The bill provides a tangible opportunity to demonstrate a desire to improve Oregonians’ lives as they re-enter society by eliminating some of the financial burden they face, while also

enhancing the re-integration process by engaging them in meaningful community involvement through volunteer work. The community service work must be completed with an identified and approved community service group, and there will be a formula to determine the monetary value of that service.

“Oregonians who have served their time in prison often face a difficult path back to everyday life in society,” Frederick said. “This provides them with relief by removing a financial burden, but it also helps them develop a sense of community by giving of their time and efforts to causes that make the community better. These sweat equity investments in their communities often can have a far better pay-off than laying down cash to pay off a bunch of fees. This will better help these individuals learn how to become contributing members of their communities.”

Senate Bill 360 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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