

In May of 1995 the State of Oregon enacted a law that requires parents to make sure that their children do not break the law. Under the new Oregon law, parents of minors involved in law breaking can be fined up to \$1,000, and be required to attend classes in parenting, and alcohol, or drug abuse prevention. The Oregon law is modeled on an ordinance first enacted by the town of Silverton, Oregon, in January of 1995, in response to a sharp increase in juvenile crime the previous year. During the first four months the ordinance was in effect juvenile crime dropped. "I don't think we're telling people how to parent," said Silverton Police Chief Randy Lunford. "We're just giving them a tool to become better parents, trying to get at some of the parental apathy and neglect," said Lunford.

Is the newly enacted Oregon law morally justifiable? If so, why? If not, why not?

MODERATOR'S ANSWER: The new law in Oregon is morally unjustifiable. No parent should have to pay a fine of \$1,000, or attend classes on parenting unless it is determined through a fair judicial procedure that she or he was actually at fault. This, in turn, would require that the law make the responsibilities of parents far more explicit. It is doubtful, however, that this could be done in a morally appropriate way that would avoid encroaching upon a parent's legitimate area of discretion in rearing children, and would take into account differences of circumstances related to factors such as poverty, problems of single parents, and so forth. As for the fact that juvenile crime appears to have dropped in the first four months that Silverton, Oregon had a law in effect similar to the one recently enacted on the State level in Oregon, such a positive result alone cannot morally justify the means whereby the result apparently was obtained.

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