

Kristy Laschober

Ashland, OR 97520

kristylaschoberspeaks@gmail.com

Oregon Senate

SB 713 Written Testimony

February 8, 2021

Thank you Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and members of the Senate Education Committee.

My name is Kristy Laschober and I live in Ashland, OR. As a formerly incarcerated woman, whose life was transformed by higher education, I am asking for your YES vote on SB 713.

When I got out of prison it was hard telling people where I had been. I came from a loving family, with every opportunity in the world, but I didn't talk about pain and trauma, and I kept the depths of my addiction a secret. My family knew, but because I was born with birth defects, my use of opioids were often justified.

The shame of addiction led me to selling drugs and I was arrested and sent to federal prison for a 5 year sentence. Through tenacity, perseverance, and support from my family, I made it out. On my last day being escorted out of the maximum security prison I was sent to because of my medical history, the final words I heard the officer say was "you'll be back". I asked him why he would say that and he replied "everybody comes back".

It's been exactly 4 years, since I heard those words from the officer. Shortly after my release I enrolled in college and was blessed with a variety of supportive people throughout my higher education journey. Each time I reluctantly shared that I had just gotten out of prison, a little piece of me healed.

I was determined to be transparent every step of the way, as I was filling out applications and applying for scholarships. So when I came across a seemingly ordinary question at the bottom of the page that asked if I had been convicted of a felony I paused. My heart began to race and shame and fear came rushing back. I reminded myself that I was a hard-working and trustworthy woman who paid dearly for my mistakes and placed an X in the box. When I came to the next question asking me to explain my conviction, I read it over a few times. I spent time changing the wording, adding and erasing, wondering how to explain that I was worthy of an education. I prayed that this question wouldn't negate my qualifications. And then I added "please give me a chance", thinking that a little begging couldn't hurt.

I later learned that 2/3 of people with a criminal record STOP filling out their application, defeated that they will not get a second chance. This is one of the reasons people go back to prison.

Last year I graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Bachelors of Science in Innovation and Leadership from Southern Oregon University and I can say without a doubt that my educational journey was the catalyst for me to find my voice advocating for myself and for those not wanting to go back to prison.

Currently I work for Reclaiming Lives, a non-profit in Medford Oregon, where I am the Director of Community Resources and a peer-support specialist. One of my biggest joys is helping formerly incarcerated individuals, that have amazing talent and leadership skills by the way, navigate their higher education journey.

For these reasons I strongly urge that you support and pass this extremely important bill. Thank you.