

Greetings Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and members of this Committee. My name is Shawn Sorensen and I am currently living in Ashland in Jackson County. I am a formerly incarcerated scholar currently pursuing my Master's of Social Work Degree at Portland State University. I am very excited to be here today to advocate for this committee to support and push for SB713 to continue to remove barriers for individuals living with criminal backgrounds seeking pathways to higher education and attainment of economic prosperity.

Similar to some of my colleagues providing testimony today, I am also a person who has numerous felonies as the result of a lifetime of drug addiction. For many years I allowed my criminal background to deter me from believing I was capable of greater achievements because of the stigma associated with having to say yes I have a felony conviction on both education and employment applications, which prevented me from even completing the application, leading me to believe I would be bound to a life -sentence beyond punitive with the stigma of being a felon.

Overcoming many self-limiting obstacles and beliefs about my worthiness of a better life beyond the scope of my past, I was able to obtain my B.S. in Psychology with the highest of honors and now continuing to climb the academic ladder as we speak. Today, I am no longer limited to my criminal convictions as I now hold greater economic and social mobility for not only myself but for the future of my children.

I am passionate about pushing this legislation to be adopted by the State of Oregon so that the thousands of Oregonians who are justice-involved are able to have access to higher education as a pathway towards the reclamation of their lives. By supporting SB713, not only would the State of Oregon be supporting 2nd chances for those who have made mistakes in the past, but the State of Oregon would be signifying that Higher Education is a viable pathway towards effective societal integration that benefits the greater good of Oregon communities.

As the U.S. continues to lead the world in mass incarceration, it is imperative that state legislation be implemented to promote both criminal justice reform and higher education. One of my favorite quotes is that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, I implore this committee to support SB713 and take this step towards increasing educational access for formerly incarcerated and justice-involved people seeking to better their lives and their families.