



Support for SB 291

Senate Committee on Housing and Development

Submitted by Paul Solomon, Executive Director, Sponsors, Inc.

Feb 10, 2021

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Paul Solomon and I am the Executive Director at Sponsors, Inc, based in Eugene. I am also the Chair of Lane County's Local Public Safety Coordinating Council (LPSCC); and co-chair the Governor's Criminal Justice Reform and Police Accountability Committee of the Racial Justice Council, in addition to many other boards related to public safety.

Sponsors, Inc., is a national leader in the delivery of Reentry services. We operate 20 buildings on seven sites in Lane County with over 200 units of housing for individuals with criminal histories and ancillary programs. We also offer a broad range of services—case management, employment assistance, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, mental health services and mentoring—that people need in order to be successful upon returning to their community. We do this because we believe that people can and do change, and that interventions at the appropriate time can serve as a catalyst to lasting change.

Our experiences with our clients, data, and research show us that the negative effects of a conviction rarely end when a person has completed their criminal sentence. Local, state, and federal statutes and regulations can make it all but impossible for many people with criminal records to truly begin rebuilding their lives. These consequences can affect everything from employment, voting eligibility, public benefit eligibility, and access to public and private housing.

While some of these statutes and regulations can be responsive to clearly identified public safety concerns, many pose unnecessary barriers to housing opportunities that are critical in reducing recidivism and supporting the long-term success of people with criminal histories. In addition, technological advances in recent years have made criminal records more widely available and, as a result, are used for non-law enforcement purposes with increased frequency. Regardless of the nature of the crime, its recency, or its relation to an individual's likelihood to fulfill his or her obligations as a tenant, such criminal histories (or in many cases, even an arrest record with no ultimate conviction) have often served as an absolute bar to finding housing.

A recent report by the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law found that “overly restrictive policies against people with criminal records can lead to a vicious cycle where ‘the difficulties in reintegrating into the community increase the risk of

homelessness for released prisoners, and homelessness in turn increases the risk for subsequent reincarceration.”

Senate Bill 291, developed by Governor’s Brown’s Housing and Homelessness Committee of the Racial Justice Council, is a good step forward in removing a clearly identified barrier to access rental housing for individuals with conviction and other justice system histories. SB 291, as amended, would ensure that a landlord may not consider a previous arrest of the applicant if:

- The case against the applicant has been dismissed without conviction;
- The applicant is presently admitted into a diversion or deferral of judgment program
- The applicant’s conviction that has been vacated or expunged,
- For which the applicant received a stay of imposition of sentencing and complied with the terms of the stay;
- For any conviction for a crime that is no longer illegal in the state of Oregon;
- For any conviction or any other determination or adjudication in the juvenile justice system;

Removing these items from consideration of a rental tenant’s application for housing will provide greater opportunity for individuals to find stable housing which can in turn support their efforts to reenter the workforce, support their families, and engage in their communities.

We appreciate of the efforts of the Governor’s Housing and Homelessness Committee of the Racial Justice Council for their work on this issue and for Senator Jama and his colleagues for the support to move this effort forward. We ask that you join us in supporting SB 291, an important step forward in removing barriers to housing for Oregonians.

Sincerely,



Paul Solomon
Executive Director