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Chair Bynum, Vice Chairs Power and Noble, members of the committee, for the record my name is Kyndall Mason; I am a political and policy strategist for SEIU Local 503, focusing on long term care. SEIU represents more than 30,000 long term care workers, in various service settings including facility based and home and community-based care settings. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of those workers in support of HB 2942.

In 2019 we worked closely with the developmental disability group home providers to pass SB 725. The bill was meant to address what employers saw as a barrier to hire otherwise qualified and talented direct support professionals within their group home settings, after misguided laws took effect. In some cases, people lost their jobs, as background check requirements changed, or became ineligible for a promotion simply because of a new law. As a member represented worker organization, we are always looking for ways to remove barriers to employment and create pathways for financial stability and career mobility.

Because of the vulnerability of the population in group homes, it is understandable why we would want to make sure we are keeping people as safe as possible. We also have a background check unit that is swamped and consistently behind, so you need a streamlined process. Most of the steps here make sense, except when you look at hiring policy through a social justice lens.

It is well known that individuals with access to recourses and a support system are often able to have charges reduced, or records expunged. This privilege means they can move on from whatever incident they encountered or mistake they made. Whereas those with fewer resources, and often a target on their back, find themselves caught up in our judicial system and are held victim to demands that they better themselves, while policies reliant on a flawed system are making it impossible to achieve certain employment and economic stability.

There is little evidence to prove that the criminal justice system is equitable or fair. Study after study shows that the system itself is rot with systemic bias and racist outcomes that affect a person's ability to move on with their lives. Why then do we create hiring policies based on outcomes of a broken system?

It should be noted that SB 725, and with HB 2942, the request is to not let rapist and murders work with vulnerable populations. The request is to simply see a person a human, capable of change, capable of being caught up in a system that is by design classist. Some of the barriers removed in 2019 were for crimes that were not even considered illegal anymore, like certain cannabis possession charges.

Removing these barriers, in 2019, took a lot of dialogue and a lot of understanding. People who live in group homes rely on the supports of director support professionals to live independently. There is a lot of trust, responsibility and care that goes into the work. People living in group homes are a vulnerable population and it is imperative that direct support professionals are able to provide consistent and high quality supports in an intimate environment, that being someone's home.

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As our bill moved through the process of becoming law, more and more agencies and organizations came out in support of the policy. The alcohol and drug commission kept finding that our state's antiquated system of policies prevented many people in recovery from ever being able to give back to that community as a peer support specialist. People with non-violent crimes, and some crimes that are not even illegal anymore, were being stifled in their ability to move forward, build a career, while giving back the community from which they came. It became very clear to me that these bias views of criminal history were affecting the workforce in many sectors, as evidenced by the introduction of HB 2942.

In the end, barriers were removed, and the background check process even more streamlined as there was more clarity added. While it is still too soon to tell if they change, has helped in the workforce crisis, one thing is very clear. There was not a sudden rush of hardened criminals who wanted to work in group homes for \$14/hr. We simply dramatically changed the lives of people who had no hope for moving forward in a career that had helped them turn their lives around and give back to the community.

While I do not claim to be an expert in MESD or educational settings, I do know that removing barriers for people who want to make their lives better, and the lives of others is always the right thing.

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