

February 22, 2021

Testimony re: SB 397

Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

I wish to offer my support for the passage of SB 397, which would streamline the expungement process for those convicted or arrested for crimes in the past and who have worked hard to change their behaviors.

I was employed for 38 years as a legal assistant in a public defender office and fielded many calls from people who had completed their sentences, their period of correctional supervision, and had become law-abiding productive citizens. Yet they continued to find that a past conviction prevented them from certain employment, rental housing, and even accompanying their children on a school field trip. They wanted to know how they could obtain an expungement of their criminal record.

I explained to them that we were not contracted to file expungements but I could briefly outline the process for them. As I explained the statutory process, it appeared daunting to many people to try to get their records expunged. Some were barred by the lengthy period of time they would have to wait to begin the process. For many who were eligible, they were lacking the skills to understand and complete the process themselves and the cost of retaining legal counsel to assist was prohibitive. For the indigent, even the cost of being finger-printed was a barrier. The expungement process in Oregon is wieldy and essentially only available to those of greater financial means. This is, at the core, an issue of economic inequality. It needs to be changed.

I urge you to pass Senate Bill 397 so that all Oregonians will have equal opportunity to better their lives and, in turn, benefit our communities.

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