

March 1, 2023

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, Members of the Committee:

My name is Helen Ying. I've been an educator for over 30 years and currently serve on the Multnomah Education Service District Board. I chair the Board Equity and Inclusion Committee. MESD provides education for more than 2,000 justice-impacted youth in detention and correctional facilities.

In 2018, MESD began the process of reviewing our board policies through an equity lens, and we decided to begin with criminal background checks and fingerprinting. In April 2019, we invited staff from the Alano Club of Portland and the Metropolitan Public Defender to help inform our work. I still remember vividly the words of the lawyer who informed us that a lot of these crimes are prosecuted in a culturally disproportionate manner. He also explained that while there is a large effort to try and make them expungeable, only 3% of people who are convicted go through the expungement process. He further shared with us the prevalence of drug dealing and prostitution as the only available economic pathways for a lot of parents who are in their forties, and fifties. This limitation of access to employment continues to perpetuate the cycle of criminal involvement, and it seems to illustrate a truly systemic issue.

MESD believes in restorative justice and the ability of individuals to transform their lives. On a daily basis, we work with justice-impacted youth who may have committed crimes because they are experiencing addiction themselves or are seeking a path out of poverty. The consequences of their actions are often long-lasting and can impact their future career prospects. Notably, for students with certain convictions, their prior criminal records may prevent them from ever working in our schools, in *any* capacity.

This represents a professional and economic barrier for these young people, and it also represents a lost opportunity for others in the justice system. Sometimes the individuals who can make the biggest impact on our students in the justice system are those who have been there themselves. They can serve as an authentic example of not only what it takes to turn one's life around, but also that it is in fact possible to do so.

SB 524 doesn't make any direct changes to our current background check and fingerprinting policies, but it does allow us as a state to review those policies and determine what's working and what might be keeping good folks out of our workforce. When we conducted a review at the local level, we found that we actually have very little discretion over these policies as state statute drives much of the employment standards for public schools. In light of not being able to

effect change on this topic at the local level, I am asking you, our legislators, to allow this work to happen at the state level.

The research-based approach in SB 524 serves the dual purpose of maintaining child safety standards while also acknowledging the ability of individuals to transform themselves and their community. My goal as an MESD Board member is ultimately to create a path for folks who could benefit a certain population of students to be able to work in our schools. In order for us to break the school to prison pipeline, we need to have people who can relate to students and serve as role models to help these youth break the cycle of criminal involvement and find a better path forward.

I hope that you will join me in supporting this bill.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'H. Ying', is positioned below the text 'Thank you,'.

Helen Ying
MESD Board of Directors, Position 2