

March 2, 2023

Re: Support for SB 697&698

Dear Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for considering my testimony. My name is Darrell White; I am a Community Health Worker at the Urban League of Portland, and I am here today to express my strong support of both SB 698 and SB 697.

I have nearly a lifetime of experience in the criminal legal system. I was a young man growing up in Northeast Portland in the 1990s, when broken windows policing and racial profiling were running rampant. I was arrested for many minor, drug-related crimes, and I was targeted under the "drug free zone" ordinances in Portland at the time. These ordinances allowed police officers, at their discretion, to exclude people like me, who struggled with substance use disorders and got convicted of drug crimes, from their own home neighborhoods, these allegedly high-crime zones. Then, they could charge us with criminal trespass when we came home. These ordinances allowed the police to target Black men like me, at their discretion, and left me with well over 100 charges on my record before I was able to get and stay clean and sober and turn my life around.

Even after I got clean, my record continued to follow me for years. At various times my record has stopped me from getting jobs, finishing my bachelor's degree, and obtaining safe and secure housing. I have had to work three times as hard as many other people to get a steady job and a steady living situation. And I have often been in the position of having to prove my worth to the world, despite my hard work to get clean and give back as a community health worker. Despite the well over 100 charges I had on my record, I was able to get my record expunged. This process was accessible to me only with my own concerted time and commitment, as well as free legal assistance with the process. I would not have been able to complete the process without both pro bono attorney assistance and my own fierce determination. I know many others are not as lucky as I am. I also had to wait nearly a year for my expungements to go through once they got filed. I strongly support expanding and automating the expungement process in Oregon through SB 697 and 698 so that other people like me, with low-level drug offenses, criminal trespass, and related crimes, can get their records cleared and have the same opportunities to move forward that I have had.

I believe that these bills are a true investment in the potential of our community. I want my whole community, including rural and non-English speaking Oregonians, to have the same opportunities to hear and move forward as I have had. There are little to no expungement legal services available for these folks. So the only way to provide a meaningful opportunity for them to get their records cleared is through automation. SB 697 & 698 make criminal record expungement more accessible, by making non-person criminal records automatically expungeable. Please join me in supporting our community through SB 697 & 698.

Thank you,

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