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Re: Support for SB 697 & 698

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

The Wasco County and Gilliam County District Attorney's Offices are writing to express our support for Senate Bills 697 and 698. Wasco and Gilliam County are in rural areas of Oregon, where the dearth of legal services is felt deeply. We know that many of our counties' residents are eligible for expungement but unable to realize this legal right due primarily to geography and lack of financial resources. As District Attorneys, we are committed to the equal application of the law; we do not believe that our current expungement laws and policies in Oregon allow for equal access to expungement. Automation of non-person record sealing will promote efficiency in our offices and allow our communities to realize the promise of SB 397.

SB 697 and 698 will improve victim services and public safety in our counties. Reducing the number of petition-based motions to set aside that come across the desks of small rural DA's offices like ours will have an enormous impact in our ability to focus on issues that better serve our residents. We know that automated expungement is intended through these bills for only non-person crimes, and thus these bills will allow us to dedicate *more* resources to protect the rights of victims and survivors. Additionally, it is important to recognize that the line between "victim" and "offender" is not a clean one— many of the victims our offices serve are also eligible to have their record expunged, but have often been unable to do so due to finances and lack of access to rural legal services. True public safety can only be achieved when every Oregonian, including rural Oregonians, can contribute to their community productively and without fear.

This legislation is also an important step towards true public safety and justice in Oregon. The Wasco County DA recently recognized in a [countywide policy](#) that:

The collateral consequences of having a criminal record affect every aspect of a person's life. Nine in 10 employers, 4 in 5 landlords, and 3 in 5 colleges and universities use criminal background checks to make eligibility determinations. Background checks can keep Wasco County residents from accessing the resources needed to promote stability for themselves, their families, and their communities-- therefore, it is imperative that criminal records exist only when absolutely necessary. Wasco County cannot afford to keep people saddled with criminal records for no reason when they could be contributing to society.

The technical fixes to record sealing in SB 697, and the automatic expungement facilitated by SB 698, will help residents of Wasco, Gilliam, and every county in Oregon achieve stability and participate fully in economic and public life.

SB 397 was an important step toward racial and economic justice in Oregon. SB 697 & 698 allow us to take the next step towards these important goals, in part by helping small, rural DA's offices like ours comply with SB 397 and ensure the same access to legal rights for rural Oregonians as their metropolitan counterparts. The technical fixes to the current law are helpful and much needed: removing the outdated and inconvenient fingerprinting requirement that can require residents of our rural counties to drive hundreds of miles, and explicitly removing fines and fees as a barrier to expungement. These fixes, plus automation of record sealing in non-person crimes, will give many of our low-income constituents access to record clearing for which they would otherwise never have the opportunity. In practice, our offices never object to applications for a motion to set aside simply because the applicant owes fines and fees, so SB 697 & 698 are a commonsense fix for our offices.

As rural DAs, we place particular value on removing barriers to success and community participation for our county residents who have reduced access to legal services and fingerprinting options. We believe that SB 697 & 968 and the associated amendments are a great investment in our communities, in the efficient and effective use of our resources as DAs, and in victim and survivor rights.

Thank you for your consideration of these important bills,

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