

March 28, 2023

Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber, Members of the Committee:

For the record I am Helen Ying and I serve as a School Board member for Multnomah Education Service District. MESD serves many young people in the carceral system. We are the educational provider in 3 out of 11 county juvenile detention centers, 3 out of 8 Oregon Youth Authority facilities across the state, and two jail facilities in Multnomah County. These youth are our students just as much as those served in more traditional settings.

As a lifelong educator myself, I know how important a high school education is for these students. It makes a critical difference in their future employment prospects. And the ability to be self-sufficient reduces the likelihood that they will recidivate. But completing their high school education is only *one* hurdle these young people must overcome.

Once a student graduates or earns their GED and they begin to look at possible career paths, they often find their criminal record is a barrier to moving forward in life. It is heartbreaking to hear staff share stories of students who talk about their dreams for the future but question whether their record will prevent them from making those dreams a reality.

To help students navigate this challenge, our staff have undertaken a dedicated effort to support our students who are eligible in getting their records expunged. We've appreciated recent legislative changes to streamline the expungement process, but it still requires time, effort, and knowledge to navigate.

Many of the students we serve are no longer our students by the time they are eligible for expungement, and our ability to help them at that point is limited. Expungement is a great tool, but we do not yet have a system to guarantee that everyone who qualifies gets their record cleared. That leaves many to face a lifetime of consequences long after they've served their time.

SB 517 is much-needed. It ensures that our students won't be held back simply because they *have* a criminal record, and it still allows licensing boards the discretion necessary to protect the public from potentially harmful actors. Another important element is the ability for individuals to find out in advance if their criminal history would make them ineligible for a particular license. As much as I don't want students to have to question whether their record will hold them back from their dreams, I also want them to be able to make fully informed decisions when they are

making career goals.

Students in our criminal justice system need hope. They need a light at the end of the tunnel and to believe that their lives can be different from what led to their arrest. Our current system keeps them in the dark due to a lack of information and in the shadows due to lack of job prospects.

I ask you to please be a beacon of hope for these students and pass SB 517. Thank you.