

## **Testimony in Support of HB 2405**

Oregon State Legislature

Good morning, Chair Hudson, Vice Chair Fragala, Vice Chair Harbick, and members of the committee.

For the record, my name is Rachel Guirsch, and I am a rehabilitated, educated and enthusiastic citizen returning to this society. I am part of a pilot program of AmeriCorps to serve the underrepresented population of formally incarcerated college students. I am also a Project Rebound PNW member.

I am here today in support of HB 2405.

Before my release date, I was given access to higher education inside Coffee Creek. I was among the first and the few to have access to rehabilitation through education within the walls. I paroled with 30 credits as a Portland State University student. I started the fall term of 2022 on campus just two days after I paroled. It was a smooth transition, giving me a safe place to have and help create a community for other students like me.

The reason I am here today is because there is a community of my peers left in prison that are smart, capable, and willing to dedicate their minds and hearts to becoming their best self. When allowed to engage in higher education, our population does not disappoint. The people I know who have been given a chance at college have met and exceeded the challenges of higher education, earning high GPAs while obtaining bachelor's, master's, and many of my peers even have their doctorates.

Join us and our colleagues from around the nation in the first of its kind national movement to provide equal opportunities for higher education for able bodies and capable minds to create a self-sufficient nation. Oregon is amongst the leading states in collaborative effort to change and offer true rehabilitation, using mass incarceration and mandatory minimums as the steppingstones to a brighter future for all.

In supporting HB 2405 you will be a catalyst of change by defying our past prejudices of classism, and racism by ensuring that people in rural areas are afforded the same opportunity as those within the Portland metropolitan area. You will also join us in our dedication to racial and educational justice for all.

Thank you for your time today, and please support HB 2405. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Rachel Guirsch 503-312-3087