

Submitter:

Gregory McGill

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

Senate Committee On Judiciary

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

SB697

I am writing to voice my opposition to Senate Bill 697, a proposal that I believe undermines public safety and the integrity of our justice system by altering the process for setting aside convictions and guilty-except-for-insanity judgments.

While I recognize the value of offering individuals a chance at redemption, SB 697 goes too far in easing the requirements for expunging serious legal records. The current process for setting aside convictions strikes a careful balance between rehabilitation and accountability, ensuring that only those who have truly demonstrated reform can clear their records. By loosening these standards, this bill risks allowing individuals with unresolved patterns of behavior—particularly those with violent or dangerous histories—to erase their pasts prematurely, leaving communities vulnerable and employers, landlords, and law enforcement in the dark about potential risks.

For example, modifying the process for guilty-except-for-insanity judgments raises significant concerns. These cases often involve complex mental health issues intertwined with criminal acts. Expediting or simplifying the expungement of such records could obscure critical information needed to protect public safety and ensure appropriate oversight. Mental health treatment and accountability should remain priorities, not be sidelined for the sake of administrative convenience.

Furthermore, this bill could erode trust in our judicial system. Victims of crime deserve assurance that the consequences of illegal actions are not easily dismissed. SB 697 sends a message that convictions—hard-earned through due process—can be swept aside with insufficient scrutiny, potentially diminishing the deterrent effect of our laws. Oregonians rely on transparency and consistency in our legal framework; this proposal threatens both.

I urge the Committee to reject Senate Bill 697 and preserve the existing safeguards that protect our communities while still allowing for fair opportunities for rehabilitation. If reforms are needed, they should be narrowly tailored, evidence-based, and developed with input from law enforcement, victims' advocates, and the public—not rushed through in a way that prioritizes expediency over justice.