

5/11/21

Breauna Hall

Chair Alonso Leon, Vice Chair Neron, Vice Chair Weber and members of the committee,

My name is Breauna Hall and I am from Eugene, Oregon. In November of 2020 I was released from prison earlier than anticipated, 5 years in fact, by the governor through the clemency process here. I had used my time to learn everything I could, to find change where it was necessary, and learned to love myself again.

One of the opportunities granted me was college courses brought inside the prison provided by Portland State University. It was a huge, huge opportunity and I hope these classes continue to be a blessing for all the future participants that it has been for myself. But now what? I am out now. Others will more than likely parole. There are, and will be, incarcerated individuals and people with criminal records who are trying to get their lives together. Getting that together will more often than not entail some form of higher education at some point.

Most people have struggles in life but people like me, we have struggled and failed. We lacked, or lack, something to see us to the side of success on our own. We need help, not barriers. While I was incarcerated the education I received was far beyond the books brought in; however, all inclusively it aided in my discovery of direction in my life, discipline where I once had none and the fortitude to survive and overcome. To believe I am capable of success with hard work and dedication in all that I do. I now know, without a doubt, what I want to do with my life and where I can go. I also know more education will be necessary. If I were to attempt to go to school just to be potentially turned away due to my past, how does that help me become a productive member of society? How does that lower our states recidivism rates? How does that help me be a better woman, mother auntie, sister, daughter? I understand my past will always follow me, but it does not have to define me. I am a person who will always try to overcome obstacles that keep me from my goals but not everyone is there yet. Many people are still learning resolve, fortitude, self-worth and things of that nature. To see that question on any application is enough to prevent a person with a criminal background from continuing the applying process, especially with something as serious as school.

As I mentioned before we have had many struggles, many obstacles and many barriers. The mandatory question about past convictions is more detrimental than beneficial. It is imperative for those of us trying to begin again to either be able to begin our educational path or finish what we began in our incarcerated season of our lives. We can not know what we don't know. We need to be taught; therefore, we need access to said teaching whatever that may look like for each individual life. I love telling people that we cannot know what we do not know; help them understand to have some grace because we do not know everything. We then need to be humble and realize we need help, then ask for it. Here I am asking for help. Help for me and all the other voices not yet strong enough to ask for their own help.

Thank you so much for your time and any consideration given to my submission towards the outcome of this bill.

Respectfully,
Breauna Hall