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Hon. Jeff Barker, Chair
and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

I am writing to urge you to support HB 2549.

Although I am a lawyer, I was unaware of the deeply disturbing laws relating to sex offenders until in 2008 my 19-year old son made a huge mistake with a teenage girl in another state. I am now the mother of a "registered sex offender" and have experienced first-hand the enormous negative impact of the registry, not just for registrants, but also for their families.

As a non-predatory offender, my son has not been listed on the public website. Yet we could not find a place to rent in Portland because my son was with us. He has finished treatment and is graduating from college this year with a science degree. Employers are excited to hire him - until they learn of his registration status. As a mother, I worry every single day that some vigilante-type person will learn of his status on the registry and physically attack him. This kind of tragedy happens all over the country in states with public website registries.

Oregon is the No. 1 state in the nation in the number of registered sex offenders per capita. One in every 100 Oregon males over the age of 12 is on the registry. Every month, an additional 150 people are placed on Oregon's registry. This is unsustainable. Moreover, recent research shows that large registries like Oregon's have no positive impact on public safety. In fact, they may undermine it.

Most people agree that Oregon's registry includes too many low-risk offenders who will never offend again. Including them on the registry ruins their chances for a productive life without any benefit to public safety.

I support HB 2549 because (1) it offers a pathway off the registry for people who have been rehabilitated; and (2) it creates more rationality in the system of deciding whether a former offender should be included on the public website. This is a smart move in the right direction. Although I have significant concerns about the methodology for assessing risk, especially for young people, women, and people with disabilities, I am confident that best practices in this area will be explored in the regulatory process.

I urge you to support HB 2549. Thank you for your consideration.

Gwendolyn Griffith