

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

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Rep. Paul Holvey, Chair
Rep. Bill Kennemer, Vice-Chair
Rep. Brent Barton, Vice-Chair
Members of the House Business and Labor Committee

Testimony to the House Business and Labor Committee in support HB 3025

My name is Jan Elfers and I am the Public Policy Director for Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO).

EMO is a statewide association of Christian denominations, congregations, ecumenical organizations and interfaith partners who work together to meet basic human needs through our community ministries, while we seek to address the underlying causes of those needs through our advocacy efforts. We urge your support for HB 3025.

A central focus of our advocacy work is to be a voice for those who live in poverty and a voice for civil rights and social justice. We believe that the scriptural mandate to "love your neighbor as you love yourself" calls us to acknowledge the dignity of all people and to resist the denigration of any person or group in our society.

Our concern in this testimony is for people who are seeking employment or housing after being released from incarceration. Oregon's criminal justice system convicts and incarcerates people of color in numbers that significantly exceed their percentage in this state. This inequity is compounded by shutting people with criminal histories out of jobs and housing. While Oregon's statewide unemployment rate is declining, the economic recovery is leaving out communities of color. African American unemployment rates remain twice as high as white Oregonian employment rates. This disparity must be addressed.

HB 3025, the Fair Chance for All Legislation, removes barriers for formerly incarcerated people by requiring employers not to ask about previous arrests or conviction records on job applications. Background checks can still be requested, but are delayed until later in the process, giving the best qualified applicant a chance to be considered for the job based upon their skills. The bill includes exemptions for certain public safety positions. Employment is one of the most important influences for decreasing recidivism. This legislation helps build stability for people trying to get back on their feet, drives down the costs of incarceration, and increases public safety.

HB 3025 is an important step towards increasing opportunity and addressing inequality in the state of Oregon. We urge your support for this bill.

Respectfully,

Jan Elfers
Public Policy Director
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon