



CHANGE IS POSSIBLE. CHANGE IS HAPPENING.

March 25, 2015
Testimony in support of House Bill 3025

Dear Chair Holvey and Members of the Committee,

My name is Andrea Paluso and I'm the Executive Director of Family Forward Oregon and the Co-Chair of the Fair Shot for All Coalition. We advocate on economic security issues that impact women and families in Oregon.

We cannot build a sustainable economy or community when we functionally exclude thousands of applicants from accessing employment, as our current system does. People who have been a part of the criminal justice system - and the families who rely on them - deserve a chance to participate fully in work and public life. However, many qualified job seekers are unable to obtain employment because of a previous criminal record.

Removing questions about convictions and arrests from job applications and delaying inquiry into an applicant's criminal history until later in the hiring process will remove an unnecessary barrier to employment for many people in Oregon who desperately need a fair chance.

In an era of mass incarceration, where the United States makes up 5 percent of the world's population but has 25 percent of the world's prison population, we must make changes to how we shape public policy. We can take one small step in Oregon by allowing the thousands of people in our state who have criminal records to access employment without facing undue barriers and discrimination.

Mass incarceration disproportionately affects communities of color. Nationally, African-American men are imprisoned at seven times the rate of their white counterparts and at three times the rate of Latinos. Black women are nearly three times more likely to go to prison than white women. And Latina women are 1.6 times more likely to be jailed than white women. The box on an employment application is significantly more likely to discourage or exclude people of color than their white counterparts from seeking or obtaining employment.¹

We are increasingly criminalizing poverty, including maternal poverty. Some who are now barred from many jobs because of a criminal record, have simply been penalized because they were not able to pay fines. Creating a spiral of debt and involvement with the criminal justice system that could and should have been avoided. Still others are being criminalized because they lack adequate access to child care and other supports. We've all heard stories recently about women who were forced to leave their children unattended while they

¹ U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Prisoners in 2011, 8 tbl.8 (Dec. 2012). Retrieved 8 March 2015 from: http://sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/rd_ICCPR%20Race%20and%20Justice%20Shadow%20Report.pdf

applied for work or worked a shift at a fast food restaurant. We are at a critical juncture where we need to ask ourselves whether we want to continue to criminalize poverty in this way – further compromising the economic security of our families – or whether we are willing to reinvest in these families, helping them secure employment, and providing access to the services that are known to reduce poverty and lead to economic advancement.

Families are put at greater risk of poverty when parents who have records are unable to find work because of institutional barriers. **Research has shown that 1 in every 50 children in the United States has a parent in prison²** and over half of those parents are serving time for non-violent offenses.³ Here in Oregon, **more than 75 percent of Oregon's female prisoners are mothers** and, as of 2012, there were 7,520 parents in prison in our state.⁴ That's not to mention the women in the U.S. who will become parents behind bars: 1 in 25 women in state prisons and 1 in 33 in federal prisons are pregnant when they enter prison.⁵

This shift to large-scale women's imprisonment in our state and across the country has resulted in an increasing number of children who experience economic insecurity. Mothers are now the primary or sole breadwinners in nearly 40 percent of families nationwide.⁶ As we continue to imprison increasing numbers of women and mothers, this has grave effects for the families who depend on them, particularly families of color who already suffer disproportionately from a lack of access to high-quality employment.

We can start to change this system today by reducing the barriers that mothers, and other parents, who have criminal records face as they try to rebuild their lives and the lives of their children. Too many are faced with insurmountable barriers to economic security- including having to check a box that doesn't give a full picture of that past or their current ability to be a productive member of the workforce.

Please pass House Bill 3025 to ban the box in Oregon and help all families get a fair chance at economic opportunity.

2 Glaze, L., & Maruschak, L. (2008). Parents in prison and their minor children. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

3 Mumola, C. (2004). Incarcerated parents and their children. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

4 Hoffman, Hannah. "Jail Birds: The Women of Oregon's Coffee Creek Correctional Facility." Jail Birds: The Women of Oregon's Coffee Creek Correctional Facility. Willamette Week, 18 Jan. 2012. Retrieved 8 March 2015 from: http://www.wweek.com/portland/article-18696-jail_birds.html

5 Maruschak, L. (2008). Medical problems of prisoners. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

6 Wang, W., Parker, K., & Taylor, P. (2013, May 29). Breadwinner Moms. Pew Research Center Publication. Retrieved 22 March 2014, from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/05/29/breadwinner-moms/>