



Theresa Sweeney, in support of HB 3025

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Chairs Holvey and members of the committee,

I have lived in the Portland area most of my life. I have raised 3 children here and I am an active community member. I have dedicated many hours to volunteering at various organizations, from volunteering at my childrens' schools and the neighborhood food bank to organizing large community events.

My path took a bit of a left over a decade ago. In November, 2003 I was convicted of two counts of Forgery/Felony, one count Attempt to commit Forgery/Misdemeanor, two counts Theft by Deception/Misdemeanor in Salt Lake City, Utah. At that time, I was also on probation in Oregon for a similar crime committed in 2001. I was sentenced to two concurrent 0-5 year sentences at the Utah State Penitentiary.

I was paroled in June 2004, received a compact agreement and returned to my family in Portland in September. I successfully completed parole early. Within a fifteen month period of returning home, I reunited with my children, found full-time employment and obtained my B.S in Criminology and Criminal Justice from Portland State University.

I was working very hard at keeping my life on a responsible and positive road. The job search did not go the way I had planned. My options were severely limited because of my criminal history. I could not secure employment in my field of study. Really I was having a hard time finding employment anywhere. Finally, I was able to retain employment at a pleasant company.

After 3 years there, I decided to return to school, again. My belief was that if I had a higher skill set and more years between me and my convictions, I would be better able to find a career. I earned my M.S in Criminology and Criminal in August 2010.

In the months prior to graduation, I began looking for a career position. I believed, at that time, with my education, knowledge, work experience and drive that I would find a good job in my field. Also, my convictions were 7 years old.

Again, the job search did not go the way I had planned. My options were still severely limited because of my criminal history. I guess Criminology and Criminal Justice is a bit of a strange choice considering my history, but it was an educational path I started over 30 years ago and I have a passion for the field.

My frustration grew the longer I looked for work. I began to feel hopeless. In January 2011, I finally obtained a position as a Residential Counselor at the Volunteers of America Women's Residential Treatment Center (WRC). At the WRC, I work with women who are facing addiction and involvement in the criminal justice system. I had to be extremely persistent in order to obtain this position, mostly because I was "overqualified". But, remember I also was unemployed.

I enjoyed my job, but my career path was still very, very restricted. I am one who believes that there is always a way to overcome challenges. I thought maybe if I was able to clean up my criminal history, I would increase my career prospects. I was not eligible for expungement in Utah, so I began the task of applying for a pardon.

It was an arduous task that took several months. I had to gather extensive records from both Oregon and Utah, obtain letter of recommendations from several sources and write a Petition for Pardon which answered specific question from the Board and explained my reasons for applying.

In January 2012, I did receive a Full and Unconditional Pardon from the State of Utah. Ok, I was ready now. I just knew everyone would be impressed with all of my efforts, my great work ethic and my contributions to my community. Well, maybe not so impressed. A pardon is still not enough. I must now get my record expunged. This means more time, effort, money and optimism (which is becoming increasingly difficult to muster).

One solution employment difficulties that I have been encountering for the past 11 years, is to remove some of the barriers that are currently in place for people with criminal histories.

I would like to ask that you consider "banning the box". This would reduce some of the barriers that those of us with criminal histories face when searching for employment. This ban would allow us the opportunity to meet with potential employers and let them evaluate us as individuals, instead of a criminal history.