

TO: House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Judith Armatta, Attorney at Law

DATE: April 3, 2015

Re: HB 3498

Chair Barker, Members of the Committee:

I write out of concern for the expansion of employment areas that are prohibited to former sex offenders. My nephew was convicted of a sex offense for having sexual relations with a girl who had identification showing she was 18, but, in fact, was a 15 year old runaway. He was 20 at the time and homeless. Since there is no mistake of age defense, his attorney convinced him to plead guilty. He spent over a year in prison due to a technical probation violation.

While he is now out of prison, off parole and doing well, his life prospects are seriously circumscribed. Since leaving prison, he has had steady work – all at, or just above, minimum wage. He has a partner and two small children to support, which is nearly impossible on his salary. As you know, there are many professions and jobs where the law prohibits sex offenders. One of the areas my nephew excels at is outdoor activities, such as fishing and hiking. This bill would assure that he could never use those skills to support his family. Yet he and others like him are no danger to anyone.

The one-size-fits-all approach to sex offenders does a great disservice to people who are trying to rebuild their lives. It does not improve public safety. Just the opposite, as the more people swept into the undifferentiated category “sex offender” diminishes attention that can be paid to the truly dangerous. The Legislature recognized this last session when it passed HB 2549, establishing three tiers for categorizing sex offenders. Limiting employment opportunities for people who have paid their debt to society is counterproductive, a burden to their families and the larger society. I urge you to oppose passage of HB 3498.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

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