

My name is Sean Barnett. I am a licensed clinical social worker, a single father of two young children, boys named Ben and Simon, aged 9 and 7, and a former Peace Corps volunteer, having served as an English teacher and HIV/AIDS prevention worker in Cameroon, in West Africa, from 2000-2002. I have just under twenty years of professional experience providing social services, beginning just after I finished college and was hired at a drop-in center for homeless youth in downtown Portland, in the summer of 1999. Prior to January of this year I had worked for just under six years at a community mental health agency in Portland, where I was the senior case manager with a program serving adults with severe, chronic mental illness, the most acutely mentally ill clients served by that agency. I had received positive evaluations every year of my employment there.

As of January 2017 I am also a convicted felon, having been arrested outside of Ilwaco, Washington, with about ten psilocybin mushrooms I had just picked while walking along a trail in a state park there. This was the first time in my entire 41 years I had been arrested or charged with any crime. The prosecuting attorney for the county where I was arrested would not consider any lesser charges or diversion programs, and I was told to expect a sentence of several months in jail if I went to trial and lost.

After reporting my arrest to my employer, I was required to undergo a new background screening by the Oregon Department of Human Services. DHS denied my clearance to return to work, barring me from working directly with "vulnerable individuals," leaving my employer no choice but to terminate my employment and effectively barring me from work in the career I have pursued for close to 20 years now. I am still awaiting a decision by the Oregon Licensure board on whether I will be able to retain my professional license, be sanctioned or have my license revoked entirely.

I now find myself unemployed with no idea what kind of work I could do and expecting that, if I am lucky enough to find someone willing to hire me, a convicted felon, odds are it will not be paying me nearly what I had been making. I am receiving unemployment insurance for now, but it is not nearly enough to cover my rent, provide for my children and continue making payments on the over \$25000 in student loans and over \$10000 in legal fees that I owe.

I feel so anxious and scared about what the future holds for me now that I can barely sleep. I have seen my entire life completely upended and a career that I cared deeply about ended, possibly for good, over possession of a handful of mushrooms. And yet I have to acknowledge that I am luckier, and in a far better position to weather this challenge than so many others dealing with the fallout of a felony possession conviction on their record. I can rely on some financial support from my retired mother, I had a work history that made me eligible for unemployment benefits. It's easy to see how someone without the many advantages I've had could end up homeless, destitute and reliant on state resources to survive, simply as the result of a single felony drug-possession conviction. Do we really think that someone in that situation is going to be less likely to commit further, more serious crimes? Less likely to abuse drugs or alcohol? Eliminating felony charges for drug possession will make it easier for those

who do get arrested for drug possession to find housing and employment, it will free up resources that could be used to offer drug treatment to those struggling with addiction.

If Oregon passes this bill, it will not have any effect on my situation (my understanding is that a similar bill had been introduced in Washington state but failed to make it out of committee), but it will help to prevent others from having to experience the devastating impacts of a felony drug possession conviction, impacts that go well beyond whatever actual punishment is handed down by the courts.