



Testimony in support of HB 2614
House Committee on Judiciary
Submitted by Paul Solomon, Executive Director
February 21, 2019

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Chair Williamson, Co-Chairs Gorsek and Sprenger, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Paul Solomon and I am the Executive Director at Sponsors, Inc, based in Eugene. I am also the Chair of Lane County's Local Public Safety Coordinating Council (LPSCC); I serve on the Governor's Reentry Council and the Work Group on Reentry, Employment and Housing (where this bill originated) in addition to many other boards related to public safety. I am testifying today in support of HB 2614.

Sponsors, Inc., is a national leader in the delivery of Reentry services. We operate 20 buildings on seven sites in Lane County with over 200 units of housing for men and women with criminal histories and ancillary programs. In 2018, we provided financial support to over 600 men and women to acquire Oregon ID and driver's licenses. The vast majority of people reentering the community post-incarceration have lost their driving privileges. Anecdotally, I would estimate that roughly half have lost their licenses for non-behavior related driving offenses. Failure to pay on a single traffic fine can result in suspension. Our class-based system unfairly punishes the poor and contributes to spiraling debt that is often a fraction of the original fine or assessment.

Over 30 years ago, I had two unpaid tickets for driving infractions, that resulted in a license suspension. At the time, I didn't have the money to pay the tickets and had to make the difficult choice of driving or losing my job. This resulted in two separate driving while suspended convictions. While I accept responsibility for my actions, the resulting consequences created a major barrier when I was released from prison in my ability to find gainful employment until I paid what had become a significant debt. All of this because I did not have the available resources to pay two \$75 tickets.

As an organization we advocate for our participants to take responsibility for their past financial debts and help them to work out payment plans. However, it is not uncommon to see people with thousands of dollars in debt that has accrued interest at an alarming pace during their incarceration and often include child support arrears, medical debt, court fines and fees, outstanding rental and utility bills, and credit card debt, on top of traffic fines and fees. When our clients do find gainful employment making \$10 - \$12 an hour on average, it is not unusual to have half of their income dedicated to paying off debt, leaving \$5 - \$6 an hour in disposable income for their housing and basic needs.

Services for People with Criminal Histories Since 1973

Phone: (541) 485-8341 Address: 338 Highway 99 North, Eugene, OR 97402 Fax: (541) 683-6196

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Meanwhile, they are lucky if they can access public transportation that gets them to and from work. In many parts of the state public transportation is simply not an option.

Debt-based license suspension is bad public policy. Please join me in supporting HB 2614, a common-sense approach that stops punishing Oregonians for being poor and reduces barriers to reentry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Solomon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Paul" and last name "Solomon" clearly distinguishable.

Paul Solomon, Executive Director