



GROUNDWORKS INDUSTRIES

Testimony of Geoff Sugerman
Groundworks Industries
Support for SB 420

Chair Williamson, members of the committee:

My name is Geoff Sugerman. I am here today representing Groundworks industries, an Oregon-owned vertically integrated cannabis company. I am also a board member of the Oregon Cannabis Association.

First, I want to thank the committee for your incredible work on criminal justice issues this session, particularly in the area of juvenile justice. These are long overdue changes that will have significant impact on young people in Oregon.

SB 420 also specifically reaches out to the many people who, while in their late teens or early 20s were swept up in previous marijuana laws, even if that occurred 20 years ago. SB 420 addresses the fact that, while expungement of previous marijuana convictions is allowed, it brings with it a costly and lengthy process involving fees, fingerprints, and usually requires the person hire a lawyer to navigate through this process.

By passing this bill we simplify the process, giving access to expungement to potentially thousands of Oregonians who were swept up in criminal convictions due to previous marijuana laws. If even a handful of Oregonians are able to apply for jobs or secure housing or remove the stigma from these convictions, it is well worth our efforts.

There is one aspect of the bill we would like the committee to reconsider. In Section 7 (b) (C), a qualifying marijuana conviction requires that the person seeking expungement must have “completed and fully complied with or performed the sentence of the court.” If this includes the payment of any fines or other financial obligations, we would ask the committee to consider removing this language or modifying it in a way that a person could seek expungement even if they had not paid some fines.

For those swept up in these convictions, many of them from communities most adversely affected by previous marijuana laws, this impediment may mean they continue to live with that conviction on their records. If we are removing fees for expunging these convictions, it seems punitive to require that same person to pay fines to get to the point where they can expunge their record for free.

Ironically, in Florida, legislators are using a similar approach regarding payment of fines to stop people with previous felonies from being able to restore their voting rights. We know that’s not the intent here, but this language will prevent people from being able to access this law, and I would argue it is the very people we are most trying to reach.

We do not want to hold this bill up because of a fiscal impact that would occur from having to consider lost revenue for fines not paid from decades ago. But it might be worthwhile to know whether this change would trigger a fiscal impact that would require the bill to be sent to Ways and Means.

Please, let's find a way to make this work for as many people as possible. For if we can restore their lives, it will pay Oregon far more down the road. Groundworks Industries urges your yes vote on SB 420.

Thank you.