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Oregon Senate

SB 756 Written Testimony

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Thank you members of the Senate Education Committee.

My name is Kristy Laschober and I live in Ashland, OR. As a formerly incarcerated woman, whose life was transformed by higher education, I am asking for your YES vote on **SB 234, SB 235, SB 241, and SB 756,**

I was incarcerated in five different prisons between 2013 and 2017 and because I had a high school diploma, there were no other educational opportunities for me. I am aware of the controversy that exists when it comes to providing education to people in prison. I was never a supporter, until I ended up there myself. The DOC, Department of Corrections, houses individuals who have committed crimes. Most of these same individuals have also had scarce opportunity, generational trauma, neglect and a clear lack of direction & support. Individuals in prison are not bad people. Now that pell grants have been reinstated, the DOC has an extraordinary opportunity to change the trajectory of lives that have already been challenging.

I share my story because I am determined to reframe perceptions regarding those incarcerated. With some perspective shifts we can view education inside the DOC as a way to transform lives. This includes providing technology support for education, helping individuals access apprenticeship opportunities upon release, establishing higher education as a "job", so that those incarcerated can attend school full-time, and finally, requiring the Higher Education Coordinating Commission to develop recommendations on how to coordinate the eligibility for students to receive pell grants.

The success of these programs will be determined by the DOC and HECC.

Shortly after my release I enrolled in college and was blessed with a variety of supportive people throughout my higher education journey. In 2019 I was honored to speak at SOU and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission dinner about my experience navigating college after prison. I didn't fall through the cracks because I had support. I am in contact though, with many men and women who have recently been released and have fallen through the cracks with no support. Those that want to apply to college are overwhelmed, especially with the technology piece and the idea of navigating buying books, getting financial aid, learning how to go online, how to study, those barriers are very real and too insurmountable for those who have no experience with higher education, it's a whole different world.

The opportunity to attend class inside, to step into the possibility of bettering oneself through education, with proper technology and consistent support by the DOC and the HECC, is a simple yet profound act of love.

Last year I graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Bachelors of Science in Innovation and Leadership from Southern Oregon University and I can say without a doubt that my educational journey was the catalyst for me to find my voice to advocate for myself and those around me. The first time I got 100% on my math test I cried. I couldn't believe I was that capable. If people had the chance to learn how capable they are inside prison, Oregon would no longer be ranked as the 13th worst state for drug use.

Currently I work for Reclaiming Lives, a non-profit in Medford Oregon, where I am the Director of Community Resources and a peer-support specialist. In this position I have learned that 30 individuals are released every month into Jackson County alone. Can you imagine if those people had the same opportunities for success as you and I have had?

One of my biggest joys is helping formerly incarcerated individuals, **who have amazing talent and leadership skills by the way**, navigate their higher education journey. If their journey had started while in prison, Oregon would be filled with more talent, creativity, perseverance and a sense of belonging and purpose.

For these reasons I strongly urge that you support and pass **SB 234, 235, 241, & SB 756** extremely important bills. Thank you.