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Oregon Senate  
SB 713 Written Testimony (In Favor)

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My name is Morgan Godvin. I am a fourth-year undergraduate public health student at Portland State University and a Commissioner on the state's Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission. I started at PSU the week of my release from prison and have been a full-time student since that day.

I was told that once I got a drug conviction, I would no longer be eligible for financial aid. In prison, I was told that I would never be permitted to get a passport again. Everyone knew that with a felony conviction the options for your future withered to nothing. None of those things were true, but I believed them. The disinformation surrounding what formerly incarcerated people can and cannot do is rampant, worsening what is already a difficult situation. We are excluded from housing. We are excluded from jobs. It is discrimination and it is completely legal. We get so used to being told what we cannot do it becomes the assumption. If someone is asking me about my criminal history, I assume it is because they want to exclude me as I have been excluded so many times before. Exclusion is the norm.

Incarceration decimated my self-worth, destroyed my self-esteem. In that weakened and vulnerable state, I re-entered into a society that sent me countless messages conveying that I could not aspire to a better life. But a better life is what I wanted. So, I enrolled in school. I got financial aid, but only after the intervention of Senator Merkley on the federal level and Senator Frederick on the state level. The fact I even knew how to contact my senators belies my racial and class privilege.

I learned to expect to be told "no." Asking the question about criminal history on college application is a deterrent, in and of itself. There comes a time where we tire of receiving rejection notices, we just stop subjecting ourselves to it. Data from a 2016 article in *The Journal of Correctional Education* by Bradley D. Custer confirms this, showing 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s of people with a criminal history never finish their college application if it asks about criminal history. A mere fraction of them would have actually been denied—just 10% or so. Despite that, the question alone denies many students access to higher ed, which is still our society's most powerful tool of social mobility and recidivism reduction. There is no need to incorporate it into admissions decisions, there is only harm. While programs should advise students if their conviction could present obstacles when it comes time for professional licensing, there is no aim that is served by deterring people from aspiring to a better life.

Sincerely,  
Morgan Elizabeth Godvin Fernandes