



Support for SB 291  
Senate Committee on Housing and Development  
Submitted by Paul Solomon, Executive Director  
May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Chair Fahey, Vice Chairs Campos and Morgan, 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); and co-chair the Governor's Criminal Justice Reform and Police Accountability Committee of the Racial Justice Council, in addition to many other boards related to public safety.

Sponsors, Inc., is a national leader in the delivery of Reentry services. We operate 20 buildings on seven sites in Lane County with over 240 units of housing for individuals with criminal histories and ancillary programs. We also offer a broad range of services—case management, employment assistance, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, mental health services and mentoring—that people need in order to be successful upon returning to their community. We do this because we believe that people can and do change, and that interventions at the appropriate time can serve as a catalyst to lasting change.

Our experiences with our clients, in addition to data and research show us that the negative effects of a conviction rarely end when a person has completed their criminal sentence. Local, state, and federal statutes and regulations can make it all but impossible for some people with criminal records to truly begin rebuilding their lives. These consequences can affect everything from employment, voting eligibility, public benefit eligibility, and access to public and private housing.

While some of these statutes and regulations can be responsive to clearly identified public safety concerns, many pose unnecessary barriers to housing opportunities that are critical in reducing recidivism and supporting the long-term success of people with criminal histories. In addition, technological advances in recent years have made criminal records more widely available and, as a result, are used for non-law enforcement purposes with increased frequency. Regardless of the nature of the crime, its recency, or its relation to an individual's likelihood to fulfill his or her obligations as a tenant, such criminal histories (or in many cases, even an arrest record with no ultimate conviction) have often served as an absolute bar to finding housing.

A recent report by the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law found that “overly restrictive policies against people with criminal records can lead to a vicious cycle where ‘the difficulties in reintegrating into the community increase the risk of homelessness for released prisoners, and homelessness in turn increases the risk for subsequent reincarceration.’”

As a person with a criminal history from over 20 years ago, I can personally attest to the barrier of a conviction history. Many years ago, I was asked to move out of a property I was renting when my landlord found out about my criminal convictions. I presently own two homes and have over thirty years of positive rental and mortgage history, not to mention thirty years of stable employment and public service. How relevant is something I did decades ago to my ability to be a good tenant?

Senate Bill 291, developed by Governor's Brown's Housing and Homelessness Committee of the Racial Justice Council, is a good step forward in removing a clearly identified barrier to access rental housing for individuals with conviction and other justice system histories.

Removing these items from consideration of a rental tenant's application for housing will provide greater opportunity for individuals to find stable housing which can in turn support their efforts to reenter the workforce, support their families, and engage in their communities.

We appreciate of the efforts of the Governor's Housing and Homelessness Committee of the Racial Justice Council for their work on this issue and for Senator Jama and his colleagues for the support to move this effort forward. We ask that you join us in supporting SB 291, an important step forward in removing barriers to housing for Oregonians.

Sincerely,

Paul Solomon  
Executive Director