

Testimony: Trina Kanewa
Support for clean slate Oregon SB 397

February 18, 2021

Chair Prozanski and Vice Chair Thatcher. Senators, Thank you for allowing me to be here this morning.

My name is Trina Lyndell Kanewa. I live in Eugene. I am here today in support of SB 397.

As a woman who is proud to be clean, sober and crime free for over 13 years now, this legislation is critical to my ability to fully let go of my past, move forward and rebuild my life. This bill would provide me the opportunity to not only thrive within my community, but also provide me the freedom to discover who I am today without being held back by a version of myself I no longer resemble: a deeply addicted person, who committed the crimes that haunt me to this day. Because of the inability to have these convictions expunged until the year 2029, I have lost jobs that I love, given up career paths I was passionate about, have struggled with securing housing for myself and my children, and have been denied volunteer opportunities in my community.

Let me be clear, I am not a victim. I am an addict. I am and have been an active member in a 12 step fellowship for 13 years. I used meth for many years, and began selling it and committing crimes in order to support my habit. I am not proud of the decade of my life I forfeited and work every day to reclaim my self-esteem, pride and self-confidence. For many years to come, I will learn to forgive myself for making choices that deeply affected and hurt my teenage daughters. I can never give those years back to them.

In 2004, I was arrested for selling meth. At that time, selling and manufacturing a controlled substance were automatically combined charges. I could not plead guilty to delivery, without also pleading guilty to manufacturing, which dramatically changed how I would be sentenced for this conviction. The courts have since separated the two charges, but I cannot retroactively have my charges changed. The cost to have this process done, would be incredibly expensive.

In 2007, I served my sentence at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, where I was able to enroll in a drug treatment program that changed my life. I found myself at a crossroad and chose to do something different with my future. To begin the healing journey, I just needed to ask for help... but to finish the healing journey, I need society to find it within themselves to fully forgive my past actions. The inability to expunge my past convictions has only served to prolong my sentence and serves as a daily reminder that society thinks less of me.

After I finished my sentence, I got a job at Arby's fast food, went back to college, graduated with a 4.0, but was crushed to find out, because of my past conviction history, I was ineligible for both the Nursing Program and Dental Hygiene Program I desperately wanted to enroll in. I accepted this crushing blow and had no choice but to reinvent myself.

My inability to find housing was one of my biggest challenges. I relied on the kindness of friends to allow me to rent rooms over the years. The manufacturing charge permanently restricted any housing agency to rent to me. I stayed much longer than I should have in unhealthy relationships, simply because I had nowhere to move out to. I felt stuck.

I eventually began cleaning homes for clients and decided to start my own business. After word spread, I was working full time within a year. For 2 years I was managing and cleaning Airbnb homes through their portal until one day I received a letter from Air bnb, stating my account has been permanently shut down after a random criminal background check. Needless to say, I lost the ability to manage these properties and I also had to explain my past with the property owners I worked for. This was embarrassing and forced me into a tough financial situation.

For the last six years, I have been on the Board of Directors with Sponsors Inc., an organization which provides reentry services for people coming out of the prison system. I mentor several women in recovery from addiction, and am active with an outdoor organization in Eugene, helping others get out to enjoy the wild sides of our beautiful State. I've gone back inside the prison which once detained me, in order to share my experience, strength and hope with women inside the institution. I am also an active volunteer for the Lane County Jail, taking 12 step meetings into the facility. Unfortunately, I am denied any volunteer positions for Lane County Search and Rescue, because of my record.

I served my sentence, I completed my post-prison supervision, and have not committed a crime in over 13 years, yet I'm still paying a price, still serving a sentence. I want an opportunity to move on with my life, therefore, I urge you to please pass SB397.

Thank you for allowing me to testify.

Trina Kanewa