



Dear Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and Members of the Committee,

Thank you, for allowing me to provide this letter in support of SB 397. Oregon AFSCME Council 75 represents around 24,000 members statewide in both public and private employer settings - all in service to the people of Oregon whether in public safety, behavioral or mental health, housing or other human services and supports. I would like to acknowledge and thank Nikki Thompson who has worked with Sen Prozanski and others in the community on this issue as part of her work at Metropolitan Public Defender. MPD local 3668 is one of the four public defense locals where AFSCME represents attorneys and/or staff.

Across multiple sectors such as housing services, behavioral health, public defense of public safety, our member all acknowledge that they are seeing the same people rotating through the system and know that it is largely due to the inadequate “upstream” supports or insufficient interventions midstream. Our costly and complicated expungement process is one of those mid-stream points that currently keeps low-income people, disproportionately Black, Brown, Indigenous, and people who are otherwise marginalized in our communities from being able to move forward on a path of success. The process continues punishment for convictions or arrests that others with financial means are able to have removed from their records. This makes an already vulnerable person unable to access critical supports such as housing and self-sufficiency programs that would provide stability as they get their lives in order and address the root causes of what may have put them in the position of having an arrest or conviction.

Our current system also keeps many people from being able to grow in careers. This is a particularly acute issue for people with lived experience working in the behavioral health and substance use treatment fields where we need to significantly grow and diversify the workforce. The cost barriers alone keep many people in lower wage jobs across sectors but also in behavioral health and recovery services where entry level positions such as peer support are paid at or just above minimum wage. While a person’s lived experience in helping guide another person through various processes and mentoring their recovery as a peer are immensely valuable, those same experiences are just as important in licensed positions that require degrees and a clear record. Too often the wait for qualifying for expungement in



addition to the cost puts that on the back burner, and earning the degree is only one step on that career path. SB 397 would reduce some of the costs and other barriers to helping a person clear their record and open up more career opportunities that will not only provide them stability but also help others.

There are many bills this session that you all are hearing to address the systemic racial and economic inequities that have been too long been embedded into our laws. SB 397 is an important piece in helping ensure that lower income people can access the expungement process and allow them the opportunities to move forward with their lives and out of a system that is currently built to keep them stuck.

Oregon AFSCME Council 75 urges your support and passage of SB 397.

Respectfully submitted by,

Eva Rippeteau
Political Coordinator
Oregon AFSCME Council 75
erippeteau@oregonafscme.org