



**Testimony in support of SB 1584
from the Criminal Justice Study Group of Multnomah County Democrats Platform Committee**

The Federal Government, the District of Columbia, and 36 states have some form of compensation for wrongful convictions, but shockingly Oregon does not. A wrongly imprisoned individual, who might have spent years if not decades incarcerated in Oregon, can be exonerated and released with nothing to help rebuild their lives. Thankfully, the state legislature now has the opportunity to rectify this injustice by passing SB 1584.

According to the Innocence Project “Those proven to have been wrongfully convicted through post-conviction DNA testing spend, on average, more than 14 years behind bars. The agony of prison life and the complete loss of freedom are only compounded by the feelings of what might have been, but for the wrongful conviction. Deprived for years of family and friends and the ability to establish oneself professionally, the nightmare does not end upon release. With no money, housing, transportation, health services or insurance, and a criminal record that is rarely cleared despite innocence, the punishment lingers long after innocence has been proven. States have a responsibility to restore the lives of the wrongfully convicted to the best of their abilities.”

According to the National Registry of Exonerations, there have been 22 exonerations in Oregon since 1989. Oregon, like every other state, is susceptible to the same causes of wrongful convictions, such as mistaken eyewitness identification, false confessions, and invalidated or improper forensic science. If the State decides to pay for such mistakes, hopefully more will be done to ensure that innocent defendants are not convicted in the first place. All of our judicial districts should form Conviction Integrity Units, and officials should be held accountable if careless or flawed investigations and prosecutions lead to false convictions with no community safety.

In the meantime, we hope all Oregon legislators will vote to compensate every individual who is exonerated. SB 1584 not only compensates for years of incarceration, but also for time served on parole or post-prison supervision or time already required to register as a sex offender. In addition, the award may include financial relief for housing, counseling, and financial literacy assistance. This comprehensive plan outlined in SB 1584 is superior to what several other states provide and if it is passed Oregon can be proud of financially remedying the terrible injustice of wrongful conviction, and be an example for other states to follow.