

Testimony supporting SB 554

My name is Sally Joughin, and I have been active in criminal justice reform for over 25 years. I was particularly interested in wrongful convictions in Connecticut during the 12 years prior to moving to Oregon. I got to know several individuals who were convicted of crimes they did not commit. Today happens to be the 61st birthday of one of those individuals. George received a life sentence for murder, and spent 20 years in prison for his wrongful conviction; now he is free! I met George's mom and then I met him, shortly after he was incarcerated, and remained friends with both of them, even though I am now far from CT. I know all about his case--the shoddy and dishonest and discriminatory behavior of police and prosecution that contributed to his wrongful conviction, and then the fantastic work of an investigator in finding the truth.

There are a variety of reasons why wrongful convictions unfortunately happen, and of course not all are the result of faulty behavior by the criminal legal system or by witnesses. Faulty forensic evidence is one cause of mistakes. Imagine if you or someone important to you was wrongfully convicted due to forensic evidence, and then later it was found out that this kind of evidence was not valid. You would definitely be very supportive of SB 554 because there would be no statute of limitations on reviewing the case and getting justice.

You may feel sorry for a victim who thought their case was settled, but wouldn't you expect that they, like you, would want to find out if the real perpetrator was never prosecuted? I would like to think all our Oregon DAs would want to make things right whenever possible, which means they might have to re-visit and re-try a bunch of old cases. It will take money and time to provide justice. But no innocent person should remain incarcerated; period. I am not interested in having "trust in the finality of convictions" if those convictions turn out to have been wrongful!

I trust that our Oregon legislators can choose appropriate and clear language in SB 554 so that claims for post-conviction review will not be frivolous and will fulfill the intent of providing real justice for wrongly convicted individuals.