

Draft – Oral Testimony in Support of Clean Slate Oregon
Prepared for Nancy Pance
Founder, Opportunity Oregon

Dear Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today in support of Senate Bill 697 and Senate Bill 698 – what I'll refer to as Clean Slate Oregon.

Thirteen years ago, I walked out of Coffee Creek Correctional Facility with \$250, a flip phone, and the grey sweats that inmate processing gave me to release in. I had just served three years of a six-year sentence for second-degree robbery, coercion, and drug possession charges. If I didn't find employment immediately, I would be sent back to Coffee Creek.

No one would hire me. No one would even give me the opportunity to prove that I could work. With the fear of being sent back to prison over my head, I would have taken a job anywhere. Every day that went by with denied applications caused me more and more stress. I kept thinking I was going to go back to prison – not because I was violating terms of my release, *but because no employer would hire me.*

The turning point for me was when I interviewed at a fast food restaurant. I had spent hours walking around town in search of a job. When the manager of the restaurant came out and asked what I "got in trouble for," I was immediately turned away. In fact, her exact words were: "you're a liability."

I left feeling defeated. Despite my efforts to "do the right thing" upon release, I felt like no one would ever give me a chance. I was truly trying to rebuild my life – I was taking classes, looking for work, and walking the right path. Hiring managers, however, were unwilling to see that. All they looked at was my record. After facing countless rejections, I ultimately decided to return to school and get my business degree, with the intention of giving back and helping people who, like me, were told they were a "liability".

Today, I run a business called Opportunity Oregon, a recruitment agency to help justice-involved individuals like myself successfully integrate back into society. We work with companies to show them the benefits of hiring from this overlooked segment of society, and then prepare formerly incarcerated individuals for reintegration and match them with jobs. Success in bringing these two groups together is success for all: the employer, the employee, and society as a whole. I

graduated from Central Oregon Community College with by Business & Accounting AAS degree in 2013. I am also a member of Linn County Chamber of Commerce and Lane County Chamber of Commerce, and active in both of my communities with numerous networking groups. I am also on the board of directors for Oregon Justice Network/JAM (Juvenile Advocacy and Mentorship). In the background, I also co-own and operate an Anytime Fitness franchise with my partner/brother Joseph Carmack, since 2015. This is now on the market to invest solely into Opportunity Oregon.

My story is not unique. Approximately 1.4 million Oregonians, or one-third of the state's population – including many who have never even been convicted – are saddled with old records that limit their ability to find employment and housing, continue their education, start a business, or participate fully in social and civic life. While [42%](#) are currently eligible to have their records cleared, the existing petition-based system is costly, complex, and time-consuming; less than seven percent will actually complete the process. In practice, that means hundreds of thousands of our neighbors are being denied the relief – and the economic opportunities – they deserve. At the same time, employers are facing ongoing struggles both hiring and retaining good employees, at a tremendous cost. Estimates indicate that the United States loses \$87 billion in GDP each year due to the underemployment of individuals with criminal records.

This Clean Slate legislation is a solution. It's widely known that access to meaningful employment and housing are two of the most effective ways to prevent recidivism. The irony? *Both are incredibly difficult to access when you have a criminal record.*

Less than 2 years ago, I was looking for a housing rental. I am a double business owner, with great income and credit, and positive recommendations from previous landlords. Yet they would not rent to me because of a crime that took place 15 years ago.

Individuals with criminal records routinely face housing discrimination, receive significantly more rejections than their peers and are forced to spend additional money on housing application fees that are rarely refunded when an application is denied. In fact, people with criminal records are [10 times](#) to [13 times](#) more likely to experience homelessness than their peers – which in turn increases the likelihood of criminal activity and intergenerational poverty.

Also of note: There are an estimated *40,000* collateral consequences to having a criminal record, of which I am keenly aware. By sealing old records, we can reduce these obstacles.

These benefits extend far beyond just the individual. Half of all kids in the United States have a parent with a record, which puts them at a much greater risk for poverty and incarceration themselves. By reducing the barriers for adults with old records, Clean Slate helps Oregonians provide for not only themselves but their families as well. I think we can all agree that when individuals and families are stable, our communities are safer and healthier.

I came out of prison a completely different person than when I went in. Individuals return from incarceration wanting to change their lives – and the vast majority of them do. Data shows that individuals who have had their records cleared are actually less likely to commit a new crime than the population as a whole.

People who have served their time and paid their debt to society deserve a second chance. Everyone in Oregon should have a fair opportunity to earn a living, take care of their families, and participate in their communities. Clean Slate will help make that a reality.

Thank you for your time today. I want to thank the sponsors of this important legislation and urge the legislature to pass SB 697 and SB 698 to Clean the Slate for all eligible Oregonians. You will be making a profound difference in the trajectory of countless lives.

Thank you for the opportunity.