



Oregon Coalition of ChristianVoices

SB 517: Occupational licenses should not be denied solely due to prior conviction

Senate Committee on Education – John Calhoun 2.28.2023

Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber and members of the committee,

My name is John Calhoun and I am here today on behalf of the Oregon Coalition of Christian Voices, which urges passage of SB 517. I would like explain why we support SB 517 by sharing a personal story.

60 years ago, in between the Korean and Vietnam wars we still had a very active draft. My brother decided to get his military service out of the way before he got drafted. He was sent to a training camp in the south and soon developed a severe skin disease from the combination of heat, humidity, and army life. The doctors did nothing to help him and he could not handle the extreme discomfort. My brother also suffered from a certain level of autism.

The combination led him to go AWOL and he disappeared for a year. He was eventually arrested. The military gave him a dishonorable discharge, which was treated as a criminal conviction at that time. I want to be clear that I do not condone any soldier going AWOL. I served as an artillery officer in Vietnam. However, I believe that if someone with my brother's condition served in the army today he would get better medical care and/or a medical discharge.

As my brother tried to find his way in life, he decided to try being a mortician. He went through mortician training in Seattle and then discovered that he was disqualified from getting a license in the state of Washington because of his dishonorable discharge. As a mortician. What on earth reason would justify that policy other than a desire to extract a continued punishment and banishment from the rest of society?

There is no reason that he should have been prevented from getting an occupational license. There is no reason why most people who have served their sentence should be continually punished for the rest of their lives by the refusal to award occupational licenses. We are wasting lives and losing talent. What do I care if a landscaper or barber or tattoo artist once got arrested for drug possession or did something wayward when they were young like my brother?

This law should have been passed years ago. I am appreciative of this committee seeking to correct this injustice and helping to make our society and economy a better place.

Just so you know, my brother later emigrated to Canada where he did not have to deal with his "record." He was employed in private industry and has lived a productive life contributing to the well-being of his community.

Others should not have to leave this country to fully rejoin society.