



Date: 2/11

RE: Support for SB 291

Central City Concern (CCC) is a non-profit direct service organization that provides integrated primary and behavioral health care, supportive and affordable housing, and employment services to people impacted by homelessness in the Tri-County area.

Central City Concern operates about 2,100 units of affordable housing, serves 9,000 patients annually through our 12 Federally Qualified Health Centers, makes 1,200 job placements annually and operates social services for the community justice programs in Multnomah and Clackamas counties. **Our programs and properties span Senate Districts 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24 and 25; and House Districts 33, 36, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48 and 50**

Our communities are safer when people have stable housing. Central City Concern provides low barrier screening criteria and works with many people who have had engagement with the criminal legal system, particularly in our transitional housing programs. In the 6-9 months, people in the transitional housing are getting employed, reconnecting with family, engaging with medical and social services as needed, but still remain at risk of homelessness because background checks routinely screen them out of housing opportunities. The Housing specialists and case managers must appeal denials, hoping for a landlord willing to take seriously the letters of recommendation, program completion certificates and other materials showing how well they are doing. The appeals process can only be successful if a landlord is willing to hold the available home or has multiple homes available, both of which are rare. To have a realistic chance at renting a home, applicants must be able to amend and supplement any 3rd party background check prior to any final decision being made.

We have seen in our data, recidivism can be cut by more than half when someone has stable housing, where they are the rent-responsible adult on their lease. Access to housing, while being a key to success, is the number one challenge for people trying to transition out of our housing programs and into the market.

We have clients that are the picture of success, truly coming full circle, who continue to be denied housing opportunities for things that are not at all reflective of who they are today. We cannot punish people forever, that is not how we have healthy and stable communities. We have former clients who spent years on the street engaging in various crimes of survival who are now Peer Recovery Mentors, Employment Specialist and Case Managers, helping others every day. We have current staff who spent long periods of time incarcerated who are now working in CCC programs in both leadership and direct service roles. We have former clients and staff who spend their personal time volunteering in their communities, getting awards for their service, being released from parole and probation early, speaking on panels and in workshops to educate others.



Shouldn't these accomplishments get the same or more weight, than years old marks on a background check done by a database system that doesn't know anything about their real life?

SB 291 can help shift perspectives and understanding for landlords by requiring the supplemental information be seriously considered prior to denial of an application, giving a whole-person review. It is for this reason Central City Concern supports SB 291. We would recommend adding possession of a controlled substance as a crime that is no longer illegal and therefore cannot be used as a reason for denial of a housing application alongside marijuana related charges.

Thank you,
Mercedes Elizalde
Public Policy Director