

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Corrections
For HB 2300

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Hearing Date: April 10, 2023 3:00 PM - or upon final adjourn./recess or bill referral if permission granted

Kirsten Ricketts

Self - Licensed Vocational Nurse

ONALASKA, TX

As a previously incarcerated individual pursuing reinstatement of my nursing license and furthering my career as licensed nursing home administrator, it would benefit me greatly to not have attached to my background, a felony drug charge that I received during my addiction over 13 years ago. I have not only recovered but have radically changed my entire life from the inside out. Since 2010, I have obtained a Bachelor's degree in Biblical Counseling, obtained a Master's degree in Human Services, am pursuing a PhD. in counseling and Psychological studies, and am pursuing a graduate certificate in Nursing Home Administration. I served in full-time ministry for 10 years working in addiction therapy and re-entry services, forming my own non-profit Restorer Of City Streets a 501(c)3 organization, entering back into the healthcare profession with the reinstatement of my nursing license in 2020. There are MANY success stories like my own, people who have served their time, paid their dues to society, obtained an education, have a passion for serving and the ability to excel but their background check prevents them from fulfilling employment positions that could greatly benefit society as a whole - this is an outright travesty!

HB 2300 would not only dramatically open up doors of closed opportunities for me but would give hope to so many that otherwise would not even try to do anything better. The collateral consequences of one bad decision should not affect the entire trajectory of a person's life, is there no way out? I implore those who may read this, to have mercy on me and the thousands of others that suffer the burden of the collateral consequence every day and please, forge a way!

Shawnee Ray

Justice impacted women

Fort Worth, TX

A released inmate should not face discrimination because of a non-violent crime. Non-disclosure would aid in reacclimating into general society and reduce recidivism rates.

Pokorski Brittany

State Wide Leadership Counsel, Lioness Justice Impacted Womens Alliance, and Myself

Weatherford, TX

I am in favor of HB 2300 because I am not the same person I was 12 when I got incarcerated. My past does not define my character now. I have been denied employment and housing because landlords and employers can see a previous conviction that happened 12 years ago. The State of Texas says that I have paid for mistakes. That is far from the truth I couldn't get a decent job because of my criminal background and for sure I could not find housing in a decent area. All because when they run my background it says manufacturing and delivery of a controlled substance from 12 years ago. Only place I could get accepted to reside at was the same neighborhoods I was trying to avoid. This bill needs to get pushed through give myself and so many others a chance to succeed in life. Imagine being judged and held back because one mistake that you made years ago that haven't made since you would not be sitting in those chairs today.

Patricia Ray

Myself

Weatherford, TX

I am in favor of HB 2300 because I believe in second chances. That someone's past does not define who they are today.

Shawnee Ray

Incarcerated citizens

Fort Worth, TX

Criminal records should not be disclosed allowing released inmates to secure housing and employment without discrimination.

Roderick McNeely

State Wide Leadership Council

Dallas, TX

I'm asking for your support of this bill, because it affects me being off parole for 13 years and my past history is still being held over my head. I am a tax paying citizen and have not been in any trouble with the law since my release from prisons, I am asking to be considered for non disclosure and to be apart of regular society again. Please support this bill, thank you.

Raymond Richard, Mr

BSTLLC

Houston, TX

We really need the representatives to look carefully at our bill and then imagine what life would be like once our backgrounds were removed

Mark Anthony Vasquez
The Statewide Leadership Council
Weslaco, TX

My name is Mark Anthony Vasquez and I am here in support of HB 2300. I come to you from Weslaco, Texas in the Rio Grande Valley where so many live with that particular distinction which we as Texans have come to accept as a Criminal Record. I am here in support of HB 2300 because it provides so many Texans - including myself - with opportunities which have been denied us for so many years.

You see, every Texan possesses within the ownership to build for our own futures in accordance with our own private industry. I am in support of HB 2300 because it provides us a chance to build a future for ourselves that has been denied us for so long.

People like Eddie De los Santos who grew up down the street, whose previous experience with the legal system was more than 15 years ago. Or, David Suarez, who graduated high school with my brother, who struggled to find gainful employment for over 10 years after conviction only to pass away at 42, having never built his home-life up after incarceration and leaving nothing behind for his children. Or, Ruben Valencia, Cristian Garza, Nathaniel Benitez, and so many Texans from here in the Rio Grande Valley who stand as living testaments to the disenfranchisement which accompanies a state-sponsored policy that denies them and us the protections afforded every American as are outlined in the 8th Amendment to our U.S. Constitution. This in turn, leaves us to the perils of what has become our second-sentencing here in our own communities upon re-entry. I am in support of HB 2300 because it addresses the remedy needed for the thousands of us serving our 2nd-sentence here in our own communities - a 2nd-sentence akin to a social-death, robbing us of the opportunity to build upon our talents, our skills, and our intellect as free and independent bodies.

I am in support of HB 2300 because it is liberation - not just to those caught under the full weight of the mass incarceration complex, but to the most vulnerable people, like Cristian Garza's children and his wife and their home in Donna, Texas. Likewise, the children of those thousands of Texans held captive under the strain of inaction and disregard as has been displayed by our elected officials in the past. Likewise, my own children - my two boys here in the Rio Grande Valley.

We urge the esteemed members of the Corrections Committee to consider how important HB 2300 is to the thousands of Texas families who have loved ones who are formerly and currently incarcerated and to the thousands of us whom are system-impacted - Texans who otherwise would do so much better and would provide a better life for their children were they able to stand as free, living and breathing bodies unencumbered by the distinction of a criminal record.

Arianna Mellinger, Ms
Self/Statewide Leadership Council/ Lioness
Longview, TX

Hello!

My name is Arianna Mellinger and I am in support of this bill. As a person previously incarcerated it would impact myself as well as many others. I have been post incarcerated for five years, life outside of incarceration is beautiful. It can however come with many difficulties. School applications, housing, and job opportunities are the hardest. My second year post incarcerated I worked for The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD as the first youth peer support specialist in the agency. I was lucky, they provided me an opportunity. During my time with The Harris Center I went to school, maintained sobriety, and held a 4.0 in all my classes. I struggled from substance abuse since the age of 14 years old on and off. I had always wanted to help others but I never could have enough sobriety until after incarceration. It was with help and support that I was able to do this. We cannot do it alone. My coworkers at The Harris Center and my circle of people who had been in the same shoes as me. Others post incarcerated. I left The Harris Center this year to move back near my hometown. I currently live in Longview, Texas. I was turned down for two positions due to my conviction. Not based of who I am today or how hard I have worked to show my worth as a employee but solely based off of a decision in my active addition. I was fortunate to gain employment at the local mental health authority as a substance abuse counselor now.

My living situation was hard. I shared a home with my family that contained with seven people in it on a good day. It was chaotic. Most places would not allow my conviction even though I maintained employment and since I reentered. I have a 4.0 a blossoming career and sometimes my conviction prohibits me from different schools. Some schools require a background check and will not grant you admissions due to history.

If this bill passes it will help brighten the light at the end at the tunnel, to help provide hope and incentives for the hard work and barriers you face when you are post incarcerated. It would provide better employment opportunities as well as housing.

I thank you for your time and consideration, I am sad to not be in person sharing my testimony to you but I hope this reaches you to consider passing HB 2300.

Sommer Alexander

SLC & Lioness

Round Rock, TX

My name is Sommer Alexander and I am a member of the SLC & Lioness Advocacy organizations and felt it was urgent that I give public testimony. Today I would like to shed light on the importance of HB 2300, known as “New Wings”, by Rep. Alma Allen that is being heard this afternoon in the House of Corrections.

While Texas law currently provides for the sealing of some records through a process known as nondisclosure, eligibility is very limited, preventing many Texans from a second chance even after they have completed any sentence imposed. New Wings would provide expanded opportunities for the many Texans who have completed their sentence with a pathway to have their records sealed.

For me this bill is extremely personal because our current justice system has left the possibility for change almost impossible for people like myself who only seek to regain their life, after being system impacted. As a result of this unforgiving justice system structure, my children, and the entire next generation of system impacted individuals' children have little to no hope for ever overcoming the mistakes we as parents made. My ability as a mother to provide a stable, safe, and thriving environment for my children is non-existent without the constant fear of having to subject my children to harsh living environments surrounded by drugs, poverty, and high crime rates.

Still to this day, exactly 9 years, 3 days later I am fighting to even be able to regain housing for me and my children. Despite my countless efforts, and devoted mindset to achieve what I deserve, I am held in bondage by my record. For a year now, I have fought and worked non stop to provide a solid financial income to survive. I started working as a dishwasher with my current employer in May 2022, and quickly was promoted because of my strong work ethic to Management. The only way that it was even made possible for me to become a full time employee, was because the general manager I work under was willing to go to bat for me upon the criminal background screening. He advised me when he made the decision to make the permanent job offer that Hilton corporations have a rule of thumb that individuals with Felony convictions are deemed as not hireable. However, he was willing to make contact directly with them on my behalf. Please note though, this is not what most individuals within Travis county experience when seeking gainful employment. Nor are we given the opportunity to find housing. It's important that I also remind the members of corrections, that nearly half (47%) of the approximately 1.25 million people in state prison are parents of minor children, and about 1 in 5 (19%) of those children is age 4 or younger. I believe this speaks in volumes for the importance of change needed for formerly incarcerated individuals. What real change is being made for the future of your future constituents, if their primary caregivers can't provide them better school districts, safe housing, and exposure

Veronica Morales

Statewide Leadership Council and self

Dallas, TX

I urge you to favorably support Alma Allen's HB 2300, New Wings. HB 2300 - New Wings would expand record sealing (nondisclosure) eligibility to the many Texans who have fully discharged their criminal sentences, but who still carry the barriers and burdens of a criminal record. Under current Texas law eligibility for record sealing is very limited, preventing many Texans from a second chance even after they have completed the sentence imposed. HB 2300 would expand eligibility to include all people who have fully discharged their sentences after a crime free waiting period of up to 10 years, the length of which would vary depending on the original conviction.

This would contribute to the economy and communities across Texas by eliminating the barriers to jobs, education, and housing that show up in background checks used by 9 in 10 employers, 4 in 5 landlords, and 3 in 5 colleges. With a nondisclosure, these records are hidden from the public but are still visible to law enforcement, courts, many state licensing agencies, and other State agencies, in addition to the federal government.

Nearly half of children in the U.S. have a parent with a criminal record, but people who receive record clearing services have been shown to have low recidivism rates. The University of Michigan found that after record clearing, people are 11% more likely to be employed and earn 22% higher wages. Please favorably support this bill and give Texans the same chance.

Stacy Venable

Myself

Dallas, TX

I am in favor HB 2300.

Marissa Rash

Myself

Aledo, TX

I am in favor of HB 2300

Wolf Sittler

self

Austin, TX

Corrections Committee Members: Current laws make every felony conviction a life sentence because, that conviction remains on their record irrespective of years of pro-social behavior after their term of supervision has expired. You have it within your power to pass this bill and help those who have completed their sentences regain their status as community members without a label from a life they left far behind. There are countless barriers to preventing a person convicted of a felony to lead a normal life. This bill is a small step in the direction of acknowledging that people do change and their past should not determine their future until their grave. I urge you to pass this bill and support the idea that everyone deserves a second chance and should not have a label attached that impacts their life forever.

rhonda gilbert

self

Brownwood, TX

I fully support this bill .Once a person serves their debt to society , they should have normal opportunities to re-enter society. without their past being a hindrance.

Jennifer Owens

Lioness Justice Impacted Womens Alliance and Myself.

lavon, TX

I support this bill. The negative labelling of people on the basis of their past behavior's is very hard to overcome. Jobs and housing are difficult to find for people with felony convictions. This bill would help so many to have a different and better life.