

Madam Chair, Members of the Committee,

My name is Zach Lindstrom and I'm here today to testify in support of this bill. You all know there has been a significant increase in demand for pardons, so I'm not going to spend time on that. A little about me. I am in recovery, I once nearly died of a fentanyl overdose and spent a couple days in comma, I have done just about every drug you can think of, and I used to drink myself to sleep every night. I spent my young adult life in and out of the justice system for making some bad decisions and choices in life. I'm sure in many people's eyes I was a hopeless case. Who here hasn't made a bad decision you regret; A decision you wish they could get a do-over on? Who here wouldn't like a fresh start?

Should people that have truly made changes in their lives and turned the corner be held back by a bad decision? Should you be endlessly punished for something that happened years ago? Even bad debt and credit has a statute of limitations, it's easier to file bankruptcy than it is to get a pardon. Have any of you ever been in jail, or prison? I have and I can say it wasn't on my list of things I wanted to accomplish when I grew up, but things happen. I can assure you most people that are there do not want to be there and are not looking to go back.

So, the question becomes how do we help people? In my opinion this bill is a great start, there are employment barriers in the way for people that have a past that has criminal charges. Having to constantly think about being held back over something you did years ago, when you did your time, paid your debt to society, is tough on your mental health and just plain sucks. You cannot get the same opportunity as someone that got a DWI, that could have killed someone. Alcohol kills more people every year than all other drugs combined, but the way we treat it, if you get caught it doesn't hold you back in most cases; it doesn't impact what kind of job you can get. In the same breath we will ruin some kid's life over having a ¼ gram of some substance they got caught with 10 years ago.

In my time in recovery and in my own life I have come to find that there are a lot of really, smart, good people that just need that opportunity to get a 2nd chance, someone to believe in them. To not have something from their past holding them back. That would excel given the same opportunity as others that have had lesser charges for equally bad decisions. These are some extremely resourceful people, that are capable of great things. I hope that you will consider this when thinking about this bill.

When I came to Minneapolis 18 years ago, I had clothes on my back and a couple of pillows in a Rubbermaid. I had no license; no money and I received \$78 a month to live off. With that \$78 I had to use \$56 of it to buy a bus pass to get a job making \$8 an hr. at a collection agency; wearing the same donated pair of dress clothes every day for 2 weeks until I got a check, so I could go to the thrift store and buy some more. I had to ride the light rail and bus to work every day, sometimes 1.5hrs one way until I could save to get my license back. That is where I started, and it was tough, most people in that situation fail, because it's extremely difficult to work through all that with no help and no opportunity at a good job, and the stress of past charges holding you back, when you are trying to do the right thing. So, what happens? They make more bad decisions out of necessity to make ends meet. This bill is a step in the right direction to change that.

Furthermore, if this Bill is passed, I will seek the opportunity to be on the task force. I understand how vitally important this is to the lives of the people looking for a fresh start, and to have people on it that have a passion to see people succeed on it.

Finally, I am happy to report I received that fresh start, I am the recipient of a pardon. It has changed my life. I have a great job as a loan officer for a top financial, I get the opportunity to share in passing on the hunting tradition to my children which was important to me. My mental health is 100 times better than prior to the pardon. I am a Husband, Father, Son, and a Friend to many. I was honored with the opportunity of being elected to the City Council in Mounds View this year, here in Ramsey County. Like my previous statement, this was not on my to do list growing up and I would not have had the opportunity to give back to my community like this had it not been for my pardon.

It's been quite a journey for me, a few months into public service, and I can only imagine what it's like at this level. One thing I'm sure of is your constituents want positive change, and to make a positive impact on people's lives, and I believe you are here to do that. You want to make a difference? This bill is your chance to do that. A fresh start is not a partisan issue. So please, I urge your support to turn this bill into a reality and give people the same opportunity I received.

Thank you for your time.

I'd be happy to answer any questions.