



The Drug Policy Forum of Massachusetts

Testimony of Whitney A. Taylor, Executive Director Drug Policy Forum of Massachusetts — June 21, 2005

In Favor of H.696 & H.697 — Acts to Reform Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) in front of the Judiciary Committee

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*Titles and affiliations listed for
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Honorable Chairs and Committee Members, I am here to testify in favor of Representative Rushing's H.696 and H.697 — acts to modify the Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) process for those not convicted of charges and the sealing of CORI records in a more reasonable time frame.

One of the highlights of the 2005-2006 Mass General Court Session has been the commitment of this body to looking at the root causes of criminality — such as addiction, mental health issues, unemployment, homelessness — how we can end the cycles of crime, addiction and recidivism. As we know in any public policy the devil is in the details — and for many individuals in the Commonwealth, the devil is CORI and how the current statute drastically limits the ability for people to be rehabilitated, get a job, find housing and become productive members of our communities.

DPFMA is working to get people who are suffering from addiction diverted from the criminal justice system into community based treatment services, a policy that I know will be very beneficial for Massachusetts. Drug Addiction is the result of other problems — not the cause. So if we ask people to become clean and sober and then build a Wall between them and employment, housing the ability to reconcile with family and loved ones — we are setting them up to fail.

That is what CORI does — it sets people up to fail. Without a job or a home, we can NOT expect people to stay in recovery and crime free. H.696 & H.697 are small modifications to the system that will allow our public policy goals to work in actual implementation and not just in theory. If people have a favorable end to their criminal charges — not guilty or charges dismissed due to success in drug treatment programs — then they do not have to worry about the next steps of finding work and housing.

Additionally, if individuals have served their time and have stayed on the straight and narrow - then their CORI records can be sealed. The longer former offenders and persons addicted to drugs go without recidivating or relapsing, the likelihood that they will decrease exponentially.

Let's have our public policy be consistent with the same ultimate goal - to reduce crime and addiction. We can help people help themselves by reforming CORI and allowing citizens of the Commonwealth to get on with their lives.

Please support H.696 and H.697

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101 Tremont St., #509
Boston, MA 02108
(617) 426-7979
www.dpfma.org
info@dpfma.org