

My Response to HB 11

My name is Preston Whited. I am an East Anchorage resident and property owner. I am married with two children, my son is two and my daughter is seven. I am a union laborer by trade and have been steadily employed in Alaska since 2003. My income was sufficient when I was single, but now, with a family, my wife and I are finding it much harder to make ends meet. We came to the conclusion that we both needed to pursue higher education if we were ever going to find financial stability.

After receiving my bachelor's degree, I thought I would have no trouble securing an entry-level position with any of the large construction or oilfield companies here in the state. Unfortunately, it proved to be quite a struggle. I made a number of poor choices in my youth, which I answered for, and for which I have a record on court view. The last entry of any significance almost 10 years old. Even so, at every interview and on every job application, I seem to be perpetually re-tried for my past transgressions. The extent to which I am penitent or completely rehabilitated, or how significantly different my life is now, is not necessarily given equal (or any) consideration.

With a click of a button, some person in human resources, whom I have never met, begins to make assumptions about my character which I never have the opportunity to defend against. Any person can pull up my criminal record history, and any clerk can enter things onto my criminal history, regardless of their training in the law or terminology necessary to accurately put CourtView records into context. The record list becomes this nebulous, striking image which barely comports with who I used to be and is not representative of who I am today. If anything, that list inspired me to be a better man, but I cannot attach an explanation to the list. I encounter striking, thoroughly unqualified images each time I aspire to be something more, develop professionally, contribute to my community, and provide a proper life for my family. I cannot imagine the collateral consequences of a capricious youth should so overwhelmingly hinder my potential to turn things around.

I would like to propose the CourtView stop making certain criminal records available to the public after ten years. Naturally exceptions should be made for public awareness, such as most Class A and B felonies, crimes of moral turpitude and any crime involving children. However, most people, my-self-included live life in stark contrast to who we were ten years ago. Thousands of people in Alaska live with decontextualized broadcasts of virtually any interactions with law enforcement like a cloud over their head, forever, without the ability to be defined by the person they became. Turning one's life around should actually mean something. But it can never be realized if someone is always someone else on paper. Until society is informed enough to put CourtView into perspective, or to realize that each individual is not his/her past, I am asking for a legislative solution to this stifling stigma. This is about advancing opportunities for Alaskans, This is about decreased recidivism, this is about faith in the prodigal son, but mostly, this is about hope.

Preston Whited