



Emilie Junge is an attorney in Portland, Oregon who works with the PCC CLEAR Clinic, specializing in criminal record expungement and the collateral consequences of contact with the criminal legal system. Before coming to Portland, Emilie volunteered in Chicago with Cabrini-Green Legal Aid, doing expungement work for four years. She has also worked as a labor lawyer and represented health care workers for over 15 years. Emilie worked to pass Measure 110 in Oregon and believes in repairing the damage done by the drug war, and taking people out of the criminal legal system, one at a time.

I am an attorney with the PCC Clear Clinic and I am honored to share information about the work that we do.

The PCC Clear Clinic provides assistance with expungement of criminal records, immigration, eviction defense and other limited legal services. I work at the “tail end” of the criminal justice system – clearing the criminal records that people have after their arrest or incarceration, once they meet the requirements and time deadlines for expungement under the law.

I like to think that criminal records expungement, like libraries, opens doors for people, and allows folks who have made mistakes to imagine and build a better life for themselves and their families.

People come to our clinic with the desire to put their past behind them, and to remove the barriers that criminal records create. These barriers are what we call the “collateral consequences” of having a record.

What do we mean by collateral consequences? Having a criminal record means you are denied jobs, you are denied housing, you are denied benefits and educational opportunities. You are denied travel. I have had people who can't volunteer in their kid's or grandkid's school or be a caregiver. Our whole community suffers because we can't enjoy a person's full participation.

Importantly, these records stay on “the books”, including dismissed cases and cases where you were acquitted, until you have the resources, knowledge, and in

many cases the money to expunge them. Without the ability to clear their records, people are trapped in poverty, put simply. I want to emphasize that in Oregon, prosecutors charge people of color more harshly, they pay higher fines, are more likely to be convicted of felony drug possession, in other words, are treated more harshly at every stage of our criminal legal system.

We do thousands of expungements in our clinics, largely with the help of people who volunteer to work with us, and along with our paralegal students at PCC. We provide free legal services to everyone regardless of their income eligibility, and no matter where their offenses happened in Oregon, through our walk-in clinic and several community clinics throughout Portland. We have done more than 7,000 expungements in the last two years but have barely scratched the surface. Right now, we estimate that less than 10% of those eligible are able to get their records expunged, so the need is huge and it is an opportunity for the whole community to help make these services available.

Although the expungement process does not hold the system accountable for the massive damage that has been done by over-policing and the consequences of the war on drugs, the process can be transformative and inspiring for people, because it is a pro se process, and people are acting to take control of their lives.

Participants are often very moved by the work we do together with them to clear their records, which will allow them to move on with their lives.

We cannot underestimate the value of helping someone disengage from the criminal system. Along with the other, wonderful work that is being done to

facilitate the re-entry of the formerly incarcerated, we hope to continue to dismantle the barriers that keep people from contributing their best selves to our communities.

Thank you