Dear Graeme Innes and Mike Gooda,

**Paragraph 1**

I am a person with lived experience of mental health concerns and a history of contact with the justice system. Unfortunately I am unable to make it to Perth as I live in Albany.

**Paragraph 2**

I am very keen for my concerns to be passed onto the AHRC and would like to hear if this is possible.

Eight years ago I received my last conviction. I was experiencing a particularly bad spell that went on for some two years. I was diagnosed with complex post-traumatic stress disorder, bi polar disorder and a plethora of axis one and axis two disorders. I was very unwell and behaved in ways I had never behaved before. I was then employed with AOD agency and the manager did not feel my record was relevant, in fact he believed it would be discriminatory not to employ me on the grounds of a criminal record.

**Paragraph 3**

I have had to leave that place of employment and am now finding it impossible to find alternative work because of my criminal record. All appears to go well until I produce a criminal record. There appears to be some misunderstanding about the whole police clearance issue and very little workplace policy around the decisions that occur based on a record being viewed, where that information is store, by whom, and if it shared.

**Paragraph 4**

I have written twice to our local member and have received no reply.

**Paragraph 5**

Prior to leaving my workplace I was employed in the court as a diversion officer. I would attend the prison to undertake AOD assessments; I was given a security key to the Albany justice Complex. I am fit to attend jury duty on August 6th but I am not fit to become employed because of my record and the misunderstanding around this process. When I was working with people with mental health and AOD concerns, particularly when in the court, I would always tell people with a record that there is hope, and I would share a bit of my story and tell them think about what I am doing today. I would tell them anything is possible if you have hope. I was very wrong.

**Paragraph 6**

People inevitably end up going back to the drugs and crime and their mental health deteriorates when they come up against discrimination of this sort and lose hope. Things have to change. Recidivism escalates; people lose hope and find the struggle too hard. I am finding it devastating and my mental health has suffered severely as a result.

**Paragraph 7**

My convictions are not who I am. I have paid my debt in so many ways. I find that having a criminal record is the non-gift that keeps on taking, even when my convictions have no relevance to the positions applied for. I am rarely given the opportunity to tell my story.

**Paragraph 8**

The MHC funded my first year at university to study BA Psychology, Criminology and Justice with ECU. I have now been forced to give up study as I am without finances and my mental health has suffered to the point where I am unable to concentrate. I realise now how difficult finding employment is for someone with a record, particularly in the human services sector. Where did the belief in recovery go? Where did the belief that people are not defined by their past indiscretions go and what of justice, how long should I have to pay for the laws that I broke? I now have to consider leaving the area and finding work elsewhere. I am now forced to consider a different career or none at all. I am an intelligent, resilient, resourceful woman. I am a good honest person and I work very hard in the community. How much harder is it for people who have even less capacity than me?

People leaving prison will experience even more difficulty finding employment and are rarely given the chance to prove they have changed and have paid their debt.

Paragraph 9

I sincerely hope you are able to assist in some way to ensure that this matter will be addressed in some way. It might now change my situation but I hope in the future others will benefit from changing this misunderstanding. This appalling level of discrimination has the capacity to destroy so many lives and so much human potential.