



**State Representative Kyle Koehler  
Sponsor Testimony – HB 263  
The Fresh Start Act**

Chair Manning, Vice-Chair Dean, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan and members of the House Commerce and Labor Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify on House Bill 263 – the Fresh Start Act.

House Bill 263 is a long-overdue fix to Ohio Revised Code language regarding occupational licenses, and addresses a serious issue in the way Ohio’s licensing boards treat individuals with criminal records.

Nearly one in five Ohioans needs an occupational license to do his or her job. Certifications for which a person might need a license in the state of Ohio range from landscape architects to referees to auctioneers. Requirements for licensure may include specialized training, experience, and testing.

The following examples are a few of the hundreds of occupations requiring an occupational license in Ohio:

- *Announcers, horseshoers (State Racing Commission)*
- *Lead inspectors, sanitarians (Department of Health)*
- *Motor vehicle repair operators (Motor Vehicle Repair Board)*
- *Auctioneers, certified livestock managers (Department of Agriculture)*

**Many occupational licensing boards automatically disqualify individuals who have been to jail or prison from obtaining a license**, regardless of the amount of time that has passed or the relevance of their past crimes to the licensed profession.

The problem lies in broad, ambiguous language riddled throughout the Ohio Revised Code when describing character requirements. References to applicants meeting “*moral character requirements*”, being “*of good moral character*”, “*of high character and integrity*”, or having “*a good reputation for integrity*” allow licensing boards to bar individuals from many professions for just one criminal violation.

**The intention of the Fresh Start bill is to require licensing boards to state which specific convictions disqualify a person from working.** This bill eliminates “blanket bans” and would allow individuals who have been convicted of non-violent, non-sexual offenses with the opportunity to be considered for these licenses.

Finally, it would prohibit boards from looking back more than five years for individuals that have paid their penalty for committing non-violent, non-sexual crimes. Research tells us that an individual who has not committed a crime after five-years have passed since conviction is no more likely to commit a crime than the average person.<sup>1</sup>

If we are to truly reform criminal justice in Ohio, improve our workforce, and empower individuals to have a second chance at the American Dream, we must reform Ohio’s occupational licensing structure.

Thank you again, Madame Chair for allowing me to present House Bill 263 for consideration. I am happy to stand for questions.

---

<sup>1</sup> Alfred Blumenstein and Kiminori Nakamura, “‘Redemption’ in an Era of Widespread Criminal Background Checks.” National Institute of Justice Journal (2011)