

Proponent Testimony
House Bill 1
Quinnan Howard
Program Coordinator of Operations, Montgomery County Office of Reentry
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Good Morning, Mr. Chairman, and Criminal Justice Committee Members. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support for House Bill (HB) 1, as introduced.

My name is Quinnan Howard, and I am the Program Coordinator of Operations for the Montgomery County Office of Reentry, and currently serve as a member of the Montgomery County Reentry Council Legislative Subcommittee. The Office of Reentry, located in Dayton, Ohio, was created in 2010 as one of seventeen priority taskforce recommendations in the “Blueprint for Reducing Recidivism in Montgomery County”. It has been our constant mission to serve the citizens of Montgomery County with programs and services that minimize barriers to effective reentry and promote a reduction in recidivism.

In 2015, the Office of Reentry developed and implemented the Reentry Career Alliance Academy (RCAA) signature program to foster the community connectivity of returning and restored citizens through partnership. The RCAA provides opportunities for adult citizens with criminal histories to reintegrate into their communities, with the help of over three dozen multidisciplinary partners, including legal referral partners such as the Miami Valley Community Action Partnership Legal Clinic and the Greater Dayton Lawyer’s Project. Within the first three years of operation, the Office of Reentry celebrated the success of 389 of 409 RCAA graduates, reflecting a 95.11% post-program graduate success rate and *post-program commitment rate to prison of 4.89%*. To date, over 500 graduates have been served via this initiative.

While the RCAA is a voluntary program, direct referral to employment resource is contingent upon successful completion and favorable drug screen in effort to accommodate the recruitment and safety needs of employers. Over 90% of the individuals served through the RCAA are experiencing obstacles to finding employment, who most often than not, have a history of substance use involvement, leading to criminal offense. While successful in connecting RCAA participants to employment, holistic approach to employment placement and job retention often depends on the commitment to sober support. As a reentry professional who routinely meets with employers seeking to find their bottom line, finding candidates who can pass a drug screen and background check rises to the top of the list. In turn, this often limits consideration to those looking for second chances. The “Legal Matters” workshop within the RCAA has been beneficial by providing lawyer access to clients, while educating them regarding record sealing eligibility.

House Bill 1 will obviously increase opportunities for those screened by removing the cap of offenses eligible to be sealed.

As a restored citizen myself, who returned home 20 years ago from serving a one-year prison sentence in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, I realized the limited opportunities I had, and how important it was to embrace the support around me. Most importantly was maintaining a drug free lifestyle through 12 Step Recovery. The engagement with drug use was the primary reason I made poor decisions that landed me in the justice system. Once I turned my life around I was fortunate to get a job in retail sales as it was important for me to provide for my young children, and myself. More than anything else the opportunity provided me a sense of pride, dignity and hope for a successful future. I was able to advance into management and cultivate skills to improve professionally and earned a bachelor's degree and a Master of Business Administration degree while working fulltime. One of the important lessons that I learned in my nine-year tenure with the company was loyalty and commitment. Unfortunately, society places stigmas and stereotypes on those of us returning to the community by limiting opportunities and enhancing barriers to success. In 2006, I had moved on from the job that provided me the solid foundation to stand on, that turned my life around, and I pursued an opportunity with a major soft drink company. I was not given the opportunity for the position and the primary reason was due to my felony conviction. What was troubling about being denied the opportunity was that I had been out of prison at that time for ten years, and as I just mentioned, had proven myself with some worthy accomplishments - not to mention my involvement in the community. Personally, and professionally my story relates to the support of House Bill 1; because it clearly displays the need to have a low-level felony record removed for an offender to be afforded an opportunity. If I would have been eligible to have my record sealed, I possibly would have been awarded the account representative job with the soft drink company.

In conclusion, there are 3 major reasons I support House Bill 1:

- **House Bill 1 will help reduce recidivism.** Recidivism is a community safety concern. Sealing a record will open more opportunities for jobs and training thereby reducing crime in the community.
- **House Bill 1 will help provide more treatment for those needing help as a result of drug abuse.** Treatment is essential for those that are addicted. Providing addiction treatment services can get to the root causes and solutions to get one's life turned around.
- **House Bill 1 will reduce annual prison operation budget costs.** The budget for Ohio Department of Corrections is the second largest in the state next to Medicaid. Sealing

records will help reduce the cost for felony 4 and 5 offenders by keeping them out of the prison system, parole, and probation.

Please pass House Bill 1, in effort to help minimize barriers for restored citizens who desire to become contributing members of the community.

Thank you for your time.

Quinnan Howard

howardq@mcoho.org

cell: 937-225-6438