



**Senator Sandra Williams
21st Ohio Senate District**

Committees:

- Public Utilities – Ranking Member
- Ways and Means – Ranking Member
- Energy and Natural Resources
- Insurance and Financial Institutions
- Finance Subcommittee on Higher Ed - Vice Chair

**Senate Bill 49 Sponsor Testimony
Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee
November 15, 2017**

Chairman LaRose, Vice Chair Kunze, Ranking Member Tavares and members of the Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 49.

Senate Bill 49 will prohibit private employers from including questions concerning an applicant's conviction record or whether they've plead guilty to a felony on an employment application. This bill will allow for applicants to present themselves and their qualifications as a whole, rather than having their prior conviction end their hope for employment the moment they submit their application.

Senate Bill 49 does not prohibit an employer from completing a criminal records check or from asking an applicant about prior arrests or convictions during the interview.

Put simply, this legislation removes the first barrier to employment for convicted felons and those that wish to become contributing members of society. Time and again statistics show that recidivism rates are correlated to limitations in finding employment following release. One study shows that employment was the single most influencing factor on decreasing recidivism, and following two years after release nearly twice as many employed people with records avoided re-incarceration than those that were unemployed.¹

Oftentimes, employers refuse to consider applicants with criminal records and significantly obstruct potential employment for years to come. According to a report composed by the National Institute of Justice on employment barrier for convicted felons, 75 percent of ex-offenders were jobless up to a year after release.¹ In a report conducted for the US. Department of Justice, it was found that employers were more likely to hire an ex-offender applicant following a face-to-face meeting and were less likely to report the applicant's conviction as the

¹Mark T. Berg and Beth M. Huebner, "Reentry and the Ties that Bind: An Examination of Social Ties, Employment, and Recidivism," *Justice Quarterly* (28), 2011: 382-410.

²Petersilia, J., *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2003; Travis, J., *But They All Come Back: Facing the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry*, Washington D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 2005.

primary reason for not hiring following an interaction.² Senate Bill 49 will increase these interactions and potentially reduce Ohio's rate of recidivism, currently at 27.5 percent, according to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections 2015 Annual Report.

Incarceration negatively impacts former inmates' upward mobility and economic prospects according to a study done by The Pew Center which shows that incarceration depresses the total earnings of white males by 2 percent, of Hispanic males by 6 percent, and of black males by 9 percent³. This depression of economic prospects does not end with former inmates, but extends to their families. Senate Bill 49 will enable former inmates to become contributing members of society, which will not only benefit the individual, and his or her family but communities and society as a whole.

In the 131st General Assembly House Bill 56 passed, which prohibits the state of Ohio from asking about an applicant's arrest or conviction record during the beginning stages of hiring, for those seeking employment with the state. Senate Bill 49 would bring Ohio in line with eight other states and over 100 U.S. cities that extends this civil rights protection beyond just government applications.

Chairman LaRose and members of the committee, this concludes my testimony, and with that, I ask for favorable consideration of Senate Bill 49. I am happy to answer any questions.

³ Pager, D., and B. Western, "*Investigating Prisoner Reentry: The Impact of Conviction Status on the Employment Prospects of Young Men*" (pdf, 136 pages), Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, October 2009. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/228584.pdf>

⁴ Petit, B., and B. Western, "*Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility*", Washington, D.C., The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010.