



The Honorable Frank LaRose  
Chair, Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee  
1 Capitol Square  
Columbus, OH 43215

Chair LaRose, Vice Chair Kunze, Ranking Member Schiavoni and members of the Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee:

Thank you for having me here today. My name is April Thacker. I am the case manager at Freedom a la Cart, a nonprofit social enterprise workforce development program that offers on-the-job paid training dedicated to empowering human trafficking survivors to a life of freedom and self sufficiency. I have been working at Freedom since 2013 and am a survivor of human trafficking myself.

I grew up in a life of poverty with drugs and addiction in my home. In my late 20s, my trafficker introduced me to crack cocaine at a party. They gave it to me for free for a short period, and then they stopped giving it to me. They showed me how to make money working the streets, performing sex acts for money, to bring the money back to get the dope. I was trafficked here in Columbus for around 7 years, and during that time, I was arrested so many times I can't even count. I once was charged with felony aggravated drug trafficking when an undercover cop asked me to help him buy drugs. I was happy that he didn't want me to perform sex acts but didn't realize I was being pulled into felony charges.

During this time, I was driving under the influence and got into a car accident. The officers found drugs in my car, and I lost my license. Eventually, I lost everything, including my children. At that point, after being arrested again, I begged Judge Barrows to put me into a treatment program. He connected me to Maryhaven, and once I was clean and sober, I began working for Freedom a la Cart.

At this point, I was attending 5 AA meetings each week, volunteering at church on Saturdays, working 2 – 3 shifts per week at Freedom, taking 3 classes at Columbus State Community College, and going to Amethyst for treatment everyday. Not having a driver's license made this incredibly difficult. I wanted to prove to society that I could be a productive member and not a menace, which is how I was labeled. But I spent a lot of time waiting for buses and sitting on buses. My children lived with my sister in Canton, Ohio, and I was unable to drive up there to visit them. I was working and trying to get off government assistance, but not having a driver's license limited how many shifts I could take. Before I could even begin saving up money to get my license back, I first paid off my child support arrearage to help take care of my family.



If I had been able to have the reinstatement fee waived, I would have been able to work more hours, I would have been able to visit my family sooner, and I would have had an easier time getting treatment for my addiction. I know the bill, as currently written, doesn't allow people with substance abuse issues to qualify for the waiver. I don't think this is a fair obstacle to put in front of someone who is trying to get to treatment and better their life.

Today, I have my license back, and my own car. I am no longer on government assistance, I have an Associate's Degree in Mental Health and Addiction Studies, and I am a homeowner. I am currently working on my Bachelor's Degree in Social Work at Capital University and working full-time serving other human trafficking survivors trying to get their lives back. Everyday, I work with survivors who are struggling to meet all their needs of recovery and work. A number of women at Freedom a la Cart have sent a big portion of their paychecks to the BMV that could have been used instead for their basic needs. It's frustrating as a social worker whose main goal is to find resources to help my clients, but when it comes to getting their driver's licenses back, the law states that they must pay a reinstatement fee no matter how limited their resources are. For those in recovery, there are multiple barriers and one of those is trying to find ways to get to AA meetings and the treatment appointments. Part of recovery is learning to be reliable and accountable, and having no reliable transportation makes it challenging.

I encourage you to pass this bill and allow reinstatement fee waivers for the poor. I implore you to consider allowing those with substance abuse issues in their past to be eligible for this fee waiver as well.

Thank you.

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