Proponent Testimony

House Bill 166 (Operating Budget FY 2020-2021)

Tom Johnston, President & CEO

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Chairman Dolan, Vice-Chair Burke, ranking member Sykes and members of the Senate finance committee, thank you for allowing me to testify on House Bill 166. My name is Tom Johnston, president and CEO of MyHuntPath, Inc. I am here to testify in favor of amendment number SC4340 submitted by Senator Eklund. The amendment, if passed, would provide funding in the state’s biennial budget for a very unique program designed to educate and train prisoners for post-release employment. MyHuntPath is a company located in downtown Cleveland that I started in 2014. MyHuntPath is a self-directed career management platform which brings technologies, tactics, and strategies together in order to effectively manage ones career from graduation to retirement. I have franchise locations throughout the United States, and I have implemented job training programs as far as way as Afghanistan. What brings me here today is a program that I developed, called ZeroBack, that I started three years ago in the Ohio penal system.  ZeroBack is designed to educate and train prisoners while in prison and to assist them in obtaining meaningful employment upon release. This is a unique model, and what makes this model even more unique, is that we continue to work with each prisoner after they are released and until retirement. The program is called ZeroBack because our goal is to have zero prisoners that return to prison after being released.  Here is how it works.

ZeroBack is a comprehensive reentry program, which begins during the initial weeks of incarceration, continually developing the skills of the inmate through his or her incarceration and providing services through release and, unique to ZeroBack, until retirement from the workforce. The program is based on the “Headhunter’s Approach” to building a successful career, learning how to promote one’s self, not waiting for the employer to come to you, but defining one’s purpose; searching and creating a meaningful career based on this. The ZeroBack program is built on an enterprise level technology platform. Services and training will be provided via on- site and video conference sessions, tablet application, hard copy, onside/internal inmate coaches and ongoing programs via closed cable programing.

ZeroBack was launched in five Northeast Ohio correctional institutions. The program has impacted over 900 individuals, of which 38 have reentered society and to date, only one client has been returned to a recovery rehabilitation treatment program. The program currently has 30+ trained on- site coaches. On- site coaching has a 2-fold benefit: creating a focus on career success after release and creating a way for clients with longer sentences to have a positive impact, both of which create a sense of value and hope for the participants and a sense of pride and purpose within the population. ZeroBack begins working with inmates within the first two weeks of incarceration.

The **Intake** phase will touch 17,500 inmates per year, at the three admission centers, performing an assessment which will define the skills the inmate currently has, unique post release challenges and what they *want* to do for a career. This assessment serves as a blueprint for developing human resource strategies that will maximize the potential for a candidate’s growth, development.

The **In-care** phase will reach 8300+ inmates per year at 5 facilities, Lake Erie Correctional Institute, Lorain Correctional Institute, Mansfield Correctional Institute, Northeast Reintegration Center, and Richland Correctional Institute. The ZeroBack program consists of 11 - 60-minute sessions. Participants are encouraged to explore their abilities and are taught career management skills; incorporating research aids, networking strategies and successful interview techniques. ZeroBack will coordinate with all internal OHRC teams, especially the Education team, as well as external resources to develop and deliver appropriate training and education.

The critical **Pre-release** phase begins six-months prior to release, approximately 3240 inmates per year will go through this phase. At this time an intensive individualized approach is implemented. Weekly 90-minute group sessions and three 30-minute one-on-one coaching sessions with a ZeroBack regional manager will be held to help focus efforts and create a sense of personal responsibility. The appropriate support organizations for housing, medical, transportation and communications will be engaged in order to assist the returning citizen with an easier reentry transition.

The **Post-Release** phase has the potential to impact over 11,500 returning citizens per year. Through Zero Back’s Community Career Center, this critical component of personal contact with these clients will be maintained with trained coaches through training sessions, hands on programming as well as online

programming.

By providing this funding we can expand this program within these five prisons. The ultimate goal is to implement this program in all Ohio prisons. Understanding that resources are limited, I would like for you to consider this pilot program upon which you can evaluate our progress and consider expansion in two years. Within our model we have implemented evidence-based measures to capture data in order to evaluate progress. The ZeroBack program can be implemented for a cost of eight cents per inmate per day, or an annual cost of $1,188,744 per year, which will be recouped by the state when less than 1% of the previously incarcerated individuals do not return to the correctional system.

ZeroBack presents an historic opportunity to become the vanguard in statewide reentry, rehabilitation and reduce recidivism through policy and programming. The time has come to spend taxpayer money effectively and efficiently. ZeroBack studies show that within two years of implementing this forward-thinking programming change, the cost savings of reduced recidivism, safer neighborhoods, and effective use of services and resources will make post release control more effective and virtually pay for itself.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify. If any of you would like to meet to discuss this in more detail, I will make myself available in person or by conference call. I am more than happy to answer any questions.