



## TESTIMONY ON

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### **House Bill 263 – Fresh Start Act**

SENATE TRANSPORTATION, COMMERCE AND WORKFORCE COMMITTEE

Ohio Senate

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Roy Lenardson

Opportunity Solutions Project

Chairman McColley Vice-Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 263 – the Fresh Start Act.

My name is Roy Lenardson, and I am with the Opportunity Solutions Project. OSP is a nonpartisan, multi-state advocacy organization that seeks to improve lives by promoting work.

HB 263 or the Fresh Start Act updates Ohio’s laws governing how boards consider applicants with criminal records.

While the specifics in the bill are very well outlined in the analysis, I would like to offer a more philosophical argument for why I think HB 263 is so important to folks here in Ohio.

Work is a miracle. There’s no other word for it.

The clothes on your back, the food in your stomach, and the roof over your head are bought and built by work.

But I said “miracle” not “material.” And that’s because the time, energy, and sweat that goes with work all have a value beyond their product. Work provides a driving force, a sense of purpose – that we all understand.

Think for a moment of your own life – and the power of work.

Maybe it’s a sound – an old engine struggling to start up in the winter when you were a kid, hearing your mom going to work before the sun comes up. Maybe it’s a smell – fresh cut grass in the summer as you pushed a mower and earned your first dollar. Or a taste – that third try at a new recipe for your little sister’s bake-sale. Or a touch – your dad holding your hand, showing you how to hammer a nail.

While each of us knows what work *looks* like -- what’s missing in so many places and programs is real vision—a vision that recognizes two truths. First, that work itself is redemptive. And, second, without an opportunity to work, there’s no such thing as a second chance. Ohio’s history is like America’s history. This is a land of second chances and new beginnings. But it just doesn’t work without work.

You know why it is so important – because this is how we build, from the ground up, a family, a town and a nation. While someone’s path to achieving success in America may take different twists and turns – work is at the core of that success.

I'll stop preaching the gospel of work here – and get right to the core of what HB 263 accomplishes. In short, it recognizes the importance of work and strives to make it clear to the gatekeepers – those empowered to issue licenses here in Ohio – that the power to issue licenses should not be about creating barriers – but should strike the right balance between encouraging work while protecting the safety of the public.

That's why I think HB 263 is such a great idea – it gives folks right here in Ohio – a second chance to experience the power of work **and** it keeps in place the ability for those issuing licenses to protect the public safety. Except now, these boards will have to be specific about why any barriers to work exist and removes those barriers where they are not needed. Also, I want you to know that you are not alone in this effort. In the past year, Idaho, Iowa, Missouri and West Virginia passed similar legislation. That brings a total of 24 states that have passed Fresh Start legislation.

There are two other things about HB 263 I would like to highlight given the current budget pressures here in Ohio:

- First, this will reduce dependency on welfare programs – which saves the taxpayers money and protects your safety net for those who are unable to work – the truly needy.
- Second, this bill will increase job opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals and in turn they will be much less likely to head back to prison – which saves taxpayers even more money. In fact, making it easier for those with records to work can help lower recidivism rates. Since incarceration costs over \$80 billion a year in the United States, any reform that lowers recidivism helps taxpayers.

In closing, I am here today in support of HB 263 because I believe as do many of you, that work lifts us up, heals our wounds, and binds us together.

Thank you for your time, and I would be happy to answer any questions.