

Good morning Chair LaRe, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Leland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide testimony as a proponent for HB699. My name is Brandon Chrostowski and I am a chef and restaurateur. In 2019 I testified before this body in support of SB 66, a bill that prioritized rehabilitation as central to incarceration. Today I return in support of HB 699 because I believe it's Ohio's next step in supporting safe communities by way of rehabilitation.

I am able to provide testimony today because a long time ago, I got lucky. When I was a teenager I made mistakes and wound up in jail. Fortunately, for me a judge gave me probation instead of 10 years in prison. While on probation I was mentored by a chef and realized my calling to be in the kitchen. I turned my life around because I was given a lifeline by a judge and my community. As a result I've become a successful entrepreneur that gives back to his community, instead of a hardened criminal.

I founded Edwins Leadership and Restaurant Institute in Cleveland. A non-profit which provides free training to formerly incarcerated individuals so they can pursue a culinary career. We've graduated over 500 students, 95 percent of them are working and less than 1% have returned to prison. Giving our students skills and a path forward is giving their life purpose and making our community safer. Since I was here last, we expanded by establishing a bakery, butcher shop, and a special events site. Additionally, Edwin's classes are now offered in 13 Ohio prisons and our curriculum is available on over 50,000 educational tablets which are used by incarcerated people throughout the United States.

I support HB 699, specifically the expansions of earned credit, transitional control and judicial release, because I know the difference it will make in Ohio.

Too many people are denied the opportunity and the tools to be successful before and after making mistakes. Edwins' success is grounded in training, encouraging, and challenging those who are ready to earn and be an asset to their communities. Allowing people in Ohio's prisons access to rehabilitative programs like Edwins' with the incentive to earn time off their sentence or the ability to finish their

sentence in a community structured rehabilitation program is a commonsense approach to holding people accountable while giving them room to grow.

While I did not spend time in prison, my life was changed because I was able to access a rehabilitation program that provided training, incentives and consequences. This legislation will give people treatment and skills so they can become success stories like me and not fall into the vicious cycle that too often occurs when someone is sent to prison. These proposals are structured in a carrot and stick approach that balances incentives with consequences.

This legislation is also a next step in the state's focus on rehabilitation. That is a powerful idea and one we are focused on at the Edwins' Institute. It is also in keeping with what crime survivors want. The Alliance for Safety and Justice did a groundbreaking study of crime survivors. They found that crime victims support shorter prison sentences and increased investment on prevention and rehabilitation including education, mental health treatment, drug treatment and job training.

Our success at the Edwins' Institute is a perfect example of the power of supporting and challenging someone to succeed. The transitional control program helps individuals transition safely back to a community setting and allows them to receive treatment that they otherwise might not receive in prison. People who are involved in the justice system are able to get treatment and training so they can be successful members of society.

I know from personal experience – both my own life and from those that we train at the Edwins' Institute today – that the best way to create safer communities is to offer meaningful opportunities for rehabilitation by giving people the tools they need to succeed.

Currently, our system sets itself up for failure. Too little incentives and too many barriers stand in the way of people who have the desire to rehabilitate themselves.

This legislation makes Ohio a safer state, with a more cost-effective criminal justice system. Most importantly, it meets the needs of crime survivors because greater access to rehabilitation means less crime. These proposals will result in

more success stories like my own and those that we work with at the Edwins' Institute.

Thank you.