



Dear Chairman Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. My name is Devon Hickman and I am the Cleveland Site Director for the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO). CEO is the nation's largest nonprofit re-entry employment provider. Since 2017, we have offered immediate, comprehensive and effective employment services exclusively to individuals with prior justice involvement, including those on community supervision, in Cincinnati, Cleveland and Columbus. CEO is dedicated to improving our communities by providing the support, skills, and training necessary for individuals to secure a job and achieve economic independence.

Today, I am here to represent myself and CEO and share our support for Senate Bill 288.

In 2021, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (ODRC) released approximately seven percent of individuals to judicial release.¹ As a recipient of judicial release, I know first hand that expanding opportunities for judicial release encourages individuals inside correctional facilities to take advantage of more programming and look for the tools and resources that would benefit themselves upon release. Knowing that I had the opportunity to receive judicial release gave me hope and urgency in taking advantage of these resources in order to expedite my return to my family.

CEO's core programming provides daily work and daily pay via transitional jobs. I came to CEO as a participant over two years ago and joined one of our transitional work crews with the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT). After gaining that work experience and additional vocational training, I was successful in finding employment outside of CEO, but quickly returned when a position became available. I was called to do this work and use my own personal journey to relate to and lead my team. Now, I run the program for CEO Cleveland as our director. Since I have taken this role, I have increased our participant wages to over \$10/hr at their CEO job placement, increased the number of individuals served year to date by over 65 percent, and expanded our partnerships with public and private employers.

SB 288 expands the earned credit time an incarcerated person may receive for completing programming; improves the threshold for judicial release to be granted, with a recommendation from DRC, if the person has served 80 percent of their sentence; and improves expungement and sealing of records. Research has found that offering programming and increasing earned time off one's sentence for participation better prepares individuals for reentry and programs like CEO, and can improve prison conditions.² Increasing earned time credits can also reduce racial disparities in incarceration and supervision terms.

CEO encourages the committee to expand eligibility for earned time, judicial release, and expungement. Almost everyone in prison will return to their communities; therefore, we must be

¹ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation & Correction (ODRC), (2022), <https://drc.ohio.gov/Portals/0/January%202022%20%281%29.pdf>

² Michael M. O'Hear, "Let the Good Time Roll: Early Release for Good Behavior in Prison," *Marquette University Law School* (2015), <https://scholarship.law.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1655&context=facpub>.



prepared to deliver high quality training and reentry services.

When participants come to CEO, they are incredibly motivated to work. We offer immediate enrollment into our program and participants are placed on our transitional work crews. During their time on crew, participants are paid on a daily basis, supervised and mentored by a site supervisor, and learn team-building skills that prepare them in finding long-term employment. When individuals come to CEO, they need more than just a job; they need access to resources so they can come out of our program and find a career. Our comprehensive model has been extensively evaluated by third parties³ for its effectiveness in reducing recidivism and increasing employment. One study showed that three years post-enrollment, CEO participants were 48% more likely to be employed than the comparison group.⁴

At CEO, we take pride in helping returning citizens find work. We acknowledge that many of our participants are faced with a whole array of challenges and barriers - including housing, safety, and food instability - all of which make it difficult for them to maintain permanent employment. That is why we build support networks with halfway houses, we connect individuals to SNAP benefits, teach classes on managing the money our participants receive on our transitional work crews, and have participants practice reframing their prior incarceration experience to prepare in answering questions during job interviews. All of these individuals are deserving of access to programming and earned time incentives.

Given this context I shared, I would also urge you to remove sentence enhancements from SB 288. Longer prison terms do not deter future criminal activity, but they do remove individuals from the workforce for longer periods and are harmful to employment prospects once an individual is released.

As Site Director, I attend every new participant orientation and tell the group that in a year from now, I will be asking them to hire someone. I try to instill in them that just as you exit, another person is right behind you, and another right behind them. I have heard cited multiple times that SB 288 aims to help more people in becoming “productive members of society” once they leave the criminal justice system. CEO Ohio is prepared to be a resource for these individuals and ensure they are given the proper chance for longstanding success. To conclude with a quote from one of my current participants, these folks have nothing to lose but everything to gain.

Thank you for providing me with the time to share my testimony on SB288. I welcome any questions you may have.

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³ See more of our evidence based practices by visiting our website. <https://ceoworks.org/impact-evidence>.

⁴ *Improving Long-Term Employment Outcomes: Promising Findings from New York State*, Center for Employment Opportunities (2019), https://ceoworks.org/assets/images/CEO-Improving-Long-Term-Employment_042319_print.pdf.