



State Representative Latyna M. Humphrey (OH-02)

State Representative William J. Seitz (OH-30)

Joint Sponsor Testimony

February 21st, 2023

Good afternoon Chairwoman Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown, and all other members of the Criminal Justice Committee. I am here today to talk about HB50, a bill that will create a Certificate of Qualification of Housing (CQH). I am proud to be the primary sponsor of this bill along with my esteemed colleague, Representative Bill Seitz.

The Certificate of Qualification of Housing is modeled on the Certificate of Qualification of Employment (CQE). The CQE program has been in place since 2012 and is a process by which those who have criminal convictions may gain relief from collateral sanctions, or penalties, disadvantages, or disabilities, formal and informal, that are included as part of a sentence of judgment.

According to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections 2022 Annual Report, Ohio released 17,942 people from custody in 2021 alone. The previous year it was 20,343. The year before that was 21,890. If you do a bit of math, you begin to realize that is a lot of people. What happens to these people next? Like everyone else, they need money and a place to live. It sounds simple, right? Go find a job and a place to rent. But what seems simple enough can be, in real life, very difficult for someone who has a criminal record. That record attaches to a person for their entire life. It dehumanizes people. It can instantly flip a person from being seen as an individual to just another statistic with an undesirable record. That record often means that potential employers automatically see the person as tainted and untrustworthy. In a time when affordable housing is already hard to find, that record often means landlords will immediately overlook that person.

How do I know? Well, I am the daughter of a returning citizen. I know personally how much my mother struggled returning home from incarceration— trying to find housing & employment for my sister & I. That was a tough time for us. My mother, a well educated woman who has pulled herself up by her bootstraps with the support around her. Now, owns her home, has a career where she helps others who struggle with addiction and spreads the Gospel across our city. Our story is a story of triumph— but we know others aren't always as lucky.

For a returning citizen, a stable home can mean everything. Research has reflected this. In a [2018 report](#), the Prison Policy Initiative stated that “formerly incarcerated people are almost 10 times more likely to be homeless than the general public.” People who have been incarcerated more than once, those who have been recently released, and women and people of color are especially hard hit. Research has also shown that housing insecurity is associated with an increased risk of recidivism. [A study](#) published in 2020 that examined people on probation found that lack of stable housing was a meaningful risk factor for recidivism, particularly for people who had lower level offenses. A stable place to live can be the difference between a successful reintroduction to society and getting caught in a devastating cycle of homelessness or repeated time in prison.

What we are proposing with this bill is a way for returning citizens to be seen as individuals again. A CQH, along with a CQE, is not an expungement but is meant to be another option to assist returning citizens in overcoming barriers as they rejoin society. No one is just handed one of these certificates. A returning citizen must apply for one and investigations by ODRC and the applicant’s local county Court of Common Pleas ensure that the person is fully rehabilitated. If a certificate is granted, it can be presented to a potential landlord and serve as proof that the person in front of them is an individual who can be a trustworthy tenant and not just another statistic to be dismissed.

Please help us work toward a safer society in which returning citizens who have paid their debt to society can be given a path to a stable and productive life. Please vote yes to HB50. Now I would like to pass to my joint sponsor Representative Seitz for his testimony.

Couloute, L. (2018, August). *Nowhere to go: Homelessness among formerly incarcerated people*. Prison Policy Initiative. Retrieved February 14, 2023, from <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/housing.html>

Jacobs, L. A., & Gottlieb, A. (2020). The effect of housing circumstances on recidivism: Evidence from a sample of people on probation in San Francisco. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 47(9), 1097–1115. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854820942285>