

# ALLIANCE FOR SAFETY AND JUSTICE



April 3, 2024

Dear Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on this important effort. We are proud to support House Bill 460 and Ohio state leaders advancing this and other improvements to our public safety systems.

The Alliance for Safety and Justice (ASJ) is a multi-state organization that promotes effective approaches to public safety, and Ohio is one of our priority states. Our flagship project, Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice, works to advance policies that help underserved crime victims and stop cycles of crime, and has over 13,000 members in Ohio. We also bring together the largest nationwide community of people with old records, through our project TimeDone. Our membership includes over 7,000 people with past records across the state of Ohio. Together we work to advance policies that help build strong families and communities by organizing to stop the cycle of crime and promote safety. Over the last five years, we have supported automated record change laws like the GROW act in states across the country.

Today, millions of Ohioans are living with an old criminal record. Whether a conviction for a felony or a misdemeanor, a diversion sentence, or an arrest, a criminal record can trigger a vast array of legal prohibitions and diminished opportunity to work that have little to do with public safety. These barriers that make it difficult to find gainful employment, secure stable housing, or support a family strain Ohio's workforce and make it harder for people to escape cycles of crime and establish stability.

We are proud to support the GROW Act because it is, more than anything, a bill about safety and economic stability. For so many people record sealing can be the difference maker that lets people find stable employment and success in the workforce. For people with old criminal records, strong connections to the workforce reduce the likelihood of recidivism and increase public safety. And, importantly, law enforcement and other key government agencies retain the ability to see records that have been sealed.

In Ohio, like so many other states, record sealing is available through a petition process but the gap between who is eligible for sealing and the number of people who are able to successfully navigate the process is immense. Because the process can be laborious, time-consuming,

expensive, and intimidating, only a tiny fraction of people eligible for sealing complete the process. These are public safety benefits left on the table.

Over the last 5 years, 12 states have already addressed this problem by passing legislation providing for the automated sealing of certain criminal records. In the next 5 years, another dozen states will. This is a proven model and one that can work for Ohio.

Ultimately we know connecting people to work and safe housing also reduces the likelihood of reoffending. If we want to invest in safety, the GROW Act is a step in the right direction.

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