

December 3rd, 2024

Re: SB 37 & SB 198: Remove barriers to those with a criminal background

Dear Chairman Ghanbari and Members of the House Homeland Security Committee,

We write to you in support of Senate Bill 37 and Senate Bill 198: common sense bills that would end debt-based driver's license suspensions in Ohio and provide meaningful reentry support to those ready to return to work.

As founders of The Empower Group, we know just how vital these reforms are to both those with a criminal background and employers. While at Nehemiah Manufacturing, we were responsible for developing, implementing and managing key social service programs for the company's nearly 200 employees, as well as providing direct, 1-on-1 care management services for those that needed them. We know first hand that employment helps formerly incarcerated people gain economic stability after release and reduces the likelihood that they return to prison. Ensuring people have reentry support and access to driving not only benefits formerly incarcerated people on an individual level, but also positively impacts society at-large.

There are currently over 300,000 open positions in Ohio that businesses are struggling to fill. Individuals who are returning from prison are often eager to get back to work and rebuild their lives, but something as simple as an ID or social security number can bar them from securing employment. Providing IDs to individuals who are returning from prison will give employers access to an expansive talent pool and will allow them to start filling open positions with motivated employees.

Furthermore, ending debt-based suspensions can keep Ohioians on the road, gainfully employed, and contributing to society. Ending debt-based suspensions also improves community safety. Having a job and remaining employed is one of the most important factors in determining whether someone will reoffend – but when people can't drive to work, it is much more difficult for them to obtain and retain meaningful employment.

It is up to us to give individuals the second chance they have earned by providing the tools needed to find employment as soon as possible. This will not only help our returning citizens, but will in turn help keep our communities safe by reducing crime and recidivism.

Senate Bill 37 & Senate Bill 198 are both good for business, good for our economy, and good for communities. We respectfully request that you prioritize the passage of both of these bills.

Basset Smith II & Elle Baker
Founders of The Empower Group