



THE BUCKEYE INSTITUTE

Safely Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Ohioans Back into Society

Interested Party Testimony
Ohio House State & Local Government Committee
Ohio Senate Bill 198

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December 10, 2024

As Prepared for Delivery

Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair Dean, Ranking Member Brennan, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding **Ohio Senate Bill 198**.

My name is Greg R Lawson. I am a research fellow at **The Buckeye Institute**, an independent research and educational institution—a think tank—whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.

Criminal justice policies signal the kind of society we wish to have. Fortunately, Ohio has signaled its interest in making society safer and more just by making it easier for the state’s formerly incarcerated to rebuild their lives upon release and remain out of prison. **Academic studies** have shown that post-release **employment** is the most predictive factor of recidivism, which makes job-related pre- and post-release policies matters of public safety.

Senate Bill 198 enhances public safety and advances the state’s interest in a just society by helping soon-to-be-released individuals obtain the documents they will need to secure stable housing and employment after incarceration.

First, it requires Ohio’s departments of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) and Youth Services (DYS) to provide soon-to-be-released inmates with identification documents needed for employment, including a certified copy of a birth certificate, a social security card, and records of any vocational training. Second, the bill requires DRC or DHS to begin the prisoner’s application for a driver’s license or state photo ID within nine months prior to release. Third, it authorizes the registrar of motor vehicles to process and approve these applications quickly and efficiently. Fourth, Senate Bill 198 rightly requires DRC to assist soon-to-be-released inmates with résumés that reflect proficiencies in any learned trades and skills—a critical anti-recidivism provision given the strong correlation between prison **educational** and **vocational** programs and successful post-release employment. And finally, the bill requires DRC to document completed practice interviews and notify inmates of any occupational licensing eligibility upon release.

According to the **National Conference of State Legislatures**, at least 21 states already provide some sort of similar document and employment-preparation assistance for their formerly incarcerated residents. And Senate Bill 198 builds upon Ohio’s successful **certificate of qualification for employment** program, which has been helping employers hire people with a criminal record. Thus, the criminal justice policies in Senate Bill 198 place Ohio in good company and will further promote the state’s interest in a safer, more just society.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions that the Committee might have.

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