



*BEFORE THE HOUSE WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE
PROPONENT TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 108*

Good afternoon, Chairman Roemer, Vice Chair Merrin, Ranking Member Troy, and Members of the House Ways & Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 108. My name is Justin Barnes, and I am the Director of Workforce, Small Business, and Technology Policy for the Ohio Chamber of Commerce.

As you may know, for 129 years, the Ohio Chamber has served as the state's leading business advocate, and we represent over 8,000 companies that do business in Ohio. Our mission is to aggressively champion free enterprise, economic competitiveness, and growth for the benefit of all Ohioans. As part of our mission, we seek to make Ohio the best place in the country for businesses to operate and grow.

In the Chamber's recently published economic competitiveness study, the *Blueprint for Ohio's Economic Future*, a section of our report is dedicated to making recommendations to improve Ohio's education and workforce talent pipelines. Specifically, the *Blueprint* calls for policies that reduce barriers to employment, and support for both second chance hiring opportunities and programs that provide wraparound services and trainings. The report also calls for supporting employers to increase recruitment and retention of veterans, employees with disabilities, and those with mental health or developmental challenges.

House Bill 108 sets out to accomplish exactly those objectives, by allowing non-profit organizations that sell donated items to retain a portion of their collected sales tax and reinvest those funds directly into workforce development programs. There are a multitude of these organizations, some of which have representatives here today to testify, that all serve their local communities by providing job opportunities, skills training, and a sense of belonging and community support for those who might otherwise not engage in the workforce.

A primary finding of the *Blueprint* is the severe impact the pandemic has had on Ohio's workforce participation rate and overall employment. According to the latest statistics from the US Department of Labor, Ohio has over 110,000 fewer individuals employed compared to February 2020. Our labor force participation rate is 61.5%, a full two percentage points lower than prior to the pandemic and currently ranked 34th out of the 50 states. Initiatives like those presented in HB 108 are creative solutions that can help those with criminal backgrounds re-enter the workforce and positively contribute to their communities and the state economy, and provide opportunities for those with disabilities to receive the support they deserve.

Addressing Ohio's workforce challenges and providing opportunities for our citizens to improve their station in life is a key objective of the Ohio Chamber, and we are again grateful for the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation.