

February 27, 2024

Judiciary Committee
Proponent Testimony
Senate Bill 37

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Judiciary Committee: thank you for allowing me the opportunity to come before you and provide proponent testimony in support of Senate Bill 37, which seeks to remove the suspension of a driver's license for a number of crimes, including drug offenses, and remove or lessen the fines associated.

I am Lauren Hunter, Human Resources Officer for the City of Columbus, Department of Public Service. As part of both a diversity initiative to draw more women into our male-dominated workforce, as well as to provide more second-chance citizens an opportunity for a better life and reduce recidivism, we created a unique partnership with the Marysville Ohio Reformatory for Women's Vocational and Horticulture Programs in July 2021. These two programs provide rigorous training, including equipment training, that translates well into our Street Maintenance, Refuse Collection, and Traffic Maintenance operations. To date, we have hired 14 ladies from these programs, with more than half having committed drug offenses.

Through this partnership, I do several recruiting visits to Marysville each year to advertise our opportunities. When a woman is nearing her release date, the teachers let us know her preference on areas to work. I set up a WebEx interview with the woman and the appropriate division to see if this is a good match. If it is, then we make arrangements to hire the women as quickly after her release as possible. Idle hands make for devil's work, and we want to get them working and productive quickly.

The biggest hurdle that we have encountered to fast-hiring post-release is the slow process to get a driver's license restored. A driver's license is a minimum qualification for our positions. Some ladies lost their driver's license due to the drug conviction, and many others had their license lapse during their time in prison. This causes a 2-3 months delay in getting them to work post-release due to all the steps to get a valid license again.

Many have significant fines to pay before they can get a license again – the largest was \$1600 from one of my new hires, which delayed her hiring for over a year.



Not having a license creates a chicken-and-egg problem: you need money to pay off the fines to get your driver's license, but you need a car to get to work to earn the money. This does not create a winning solution that promotes a positive reformed citizen mindset.

Ohio Penal Industries (OPI) does assist some inmates on getting their license restored if they are part of the OPI workforce and cleared to work outside of the prison. If this approach could be expanded to working with all eligible inmates as they near their release date, this would enable the ladies to get hired as quickly as a couple of weeks post-release.

Additionally, Richland Men's Prison, and starting soon at Grafton, has a commercial driver's license (CDL) class A training program. This would be a valuable and marketable skill post-release for these individuals to get jobs, and could be a relatively easy program to expand out to all of Ohio's prisons. I have almost 300 jobs in my department alone that require a CDL.

Our program's ability to offer employment to ladies prior to their release has proven to be transformative for their reentry success. We support this bill to help them either keep, or get back, their driver's licenses quickly so they can start their new life. Thank you again for the opportunity to present proponent testimony in support of Senate Bill 37. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

If you have questions or would like additional information, please feel free to contact me at:

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