

Ohio Statehouse
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, OH 43215

October 10, 2023

HB 50 Proponent Testimony – Senate Community Revitalization Committee

Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Hoagland, and Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the committee: thank you for the time to present proponent testimony on House Bill 50, a mechanism to create a certificate of qualified housing, known as a “CQH”. On behalf of Prison Fellowship, I am grateful to Representative Humphrey and Representative Seitz for introducing this legislation. Prison Fellowship is the nation’s largest Christian nonprofit serving prisoners, former prisoners, and their families, and a leading advocate for criminal justice reform. Established on the belief that all people are created in God’s image and that no life is beyond His reach, Prison Fellowship takes a restorative approach to all those affected by crime and incarceration.

Every person has dignity and potential. But nearly 1 in 3 American adults have a criminal record and face significant barriers to education, jobs, housing, and other opportunities needed to reach their potential. Housing is a foundational factor for health, safety, and opportunity. But for many people with a criminal record, stable and affordable housing is out of reach. Formerly incarcerated Ohioans should be afforded safe and tangible pathways to housing in their pursuit of productive citizenship.

In 2021, over 20,000 Ohioans were released from state correctional facilities—with a majority of them returning back to Ohio communities and in need of safe, accessible housing.¹ Research found that formerly incarcerated individuals were ten times more likely to be homeless as compared to the general public.² There is a strong connection between a stable home and a positive start in reintegrating back into society. A study of individuals on probation supervision found significantly lower reoffense rates for low-risk individuals who obtained housing compared to their peers who did not.³ When individuals can find stable housing after prison or jail, they are less likely to reoffend, with tangible benefits for public safety.⁴ Without housing stability, individuals often experience homelessness or negative, unhealthy environments that increase the odds of future substance abuse and criminal behavior.

If passed, HB 50 would establish a sensible petition process for formerly incarcerated Ohioans to apply for a Certificate of Qualified Housing (CQH) from the courts. Similar certificates have demonstrated positive impacts in Ohio already. In fact, in 2012, Ohio developed a Certificate for Qualified Employment (CQE) with promising results in expanding access to gainful work.⁵ HB 50 presents an opportunity to leverage this promising policy tool and use it to address one of the most pressing needs in reentry. The legislation outlines a robust application process, where the

¹ Wendy Sawyer, *Since you asked: How many people are released from each state’s prisons and jails every year?*, Prison Policy Initiative (August 2022), <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2022/08/25/releasesbystate/>.

² Lucius Couloute, *Nowhere to Go: Homelessness among formerly incarcerated people*, Prison Policy Initiative (August 2018), <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/housing.html>.

³ Leah A. Jacobs & Aaron Gottlieb, *The Effect of Housing Circumstances on Recidivism*, 47 Crim Justice Behav. 9 (2020)

⁴ Kimberly Burrowes, *Can Housing Interventions Reduce Incarceration and Recidivism*, Housing Matters: An Urban Institute Initiative (Feb. 2019), <https://housingmatters.urban.org/articles/can-housing-interventions-reduce-incarceration-and-recidivism>.

⁵ ODRC, *Certificate of Qualification for Employment*, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation & Correction (Last Accessed May 2023), <https://drc.ohio.gov/systems-and-services/2-reentry-services/certificate-of-qualification-for-employment-cqe>.

court may consider a variety of factors for the issuance of a CQH, including behavior during incarceration and community supervision, criminal history, employment history, and personal references. HB 50 would provide liability coverage to housing decision makers who accept Ohioans with a CQH. Through obtaining a CQH, Ohioans leaving incarceration would also be more attractive tenant candidates in their search for affordable housing.

Every formerly incarcerated individual is endowed with inherent dignity and has the ability—and responsibility—to live out their God-given potential. By supporting HB 50, you can set up Ohioans for safety, stability, and success in reentry.

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