

February 26, 2024

Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee

Proponent Testimony

Senate Bill 198

Written Testimony Only

Chairman Lang, Vice Chair Wilkin, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee: thank you for allowing me the opportunity to come before you and provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 198, which seeks to support businesses and returning citizens through improving and enhancing reentry services and preparation prerelease.

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.

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.

We have encountered several hurdles to fast-hiring post-release:

1. Without support, the ladies don't have resumes or really know how to prepare for an interview.
2. The ladies don't have their education transcript/ apprenticeship hours to provide to an employer to show they meet the minimum qualifications of a position.
3. The ladies don't have the identification documents to get a driver's license, and that driver's license is a required minimum qualification for our jobs.
4. The ladies don't always have the documents they need to verify their identity and ability to work in the United States for the I-9 form.

Our program's ability to offer employment to ladies prior to their release has proven to be transformative for their reentry success. This is a model that should be expanded and would be supported by the requirements of SB 198.



Having access to these necessary documents upon release would speed up the time to get these ladies working: without this assistance, it has taken 2-3 months for them to gather what they need to start working. If the ladies had these documents upon release, we could have someone hired and starting working in a couple of weeks. The delay in documentation impacts our productivity, and can be a cause for potential recidivism.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote yes on this critically important bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. If you have questions or would like additional information, please feel free to contact me at:

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