



Ohio Statehouse  
1 Capitol Square  
Columbus, OH 43215

*Seek justice. Love mercy. Restore hope.*

February 26, 2024

## SB 198 Proponent Testimony – Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity

Chair Lang, Vice Chair Wilkin, and Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 198, that would allow returning citizens to have important personal documents when they are released from incarceration. I also want to thank Senator Manning and Chair Lang for introducing this legislation.

I am presenting written testimony on behalf of Prison Fellowship, 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.

First, recognizing that the transition from prison to outside society can be a daunting prospect. A key factor in successful reentry is the ability to find steady employment, yet the unemployment rate for formerly incarcerated people is nearly five times higher than the general population.<sup>1</sup> We believe in equipping the almost 18,000 Ohioans returning home from prison each year with tools that will help them construct a pathway back to meaningful employment and productive citizenship<sup>2</sup>. For these reasons, we support SB 198, that will provide individuals leaving prison or youth services with proper identification and employment-related documents. With these key resources, formerly incarcerated people and youth will be able to prove their identity, demonstrate skills, and obtain employment. When public policy affirms the dignity and potential of every human being, we will all benefit from stronger economies, safer communities, and flourishing families.

SB 198 would ensure that when an individual is released from the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (DRC) or Department of Youth Service (DYS), will be able to apply for an identification card and other key personal documents within the nine months before they are released. Not having basic documentation like social security or identification cards continues to be a barrier inhibiting the safety and success of people seeking to leave crime behind. SB 198 would remove this hurdle and make it easier to apply for employment, housing, transportation, and education.

Access to meaningful employment is not only an issue of public safety, but of economic success. By providing people with simple, practical identification documents along with licenses and training certificates reflecting work completed during incarceration, we lower the hurdles to success they will inevitably face. A thriving economy in Ohio will include the valued contributions of formerly incarcerated neighbors who are ready to work hard and give back.

Ohioans returning from prison and detention have dignity and potential. By supporting SB 198, you can set up Ohioans for a successful and supportive return home.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

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Legislative Strategist  
Prison Fellowship

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<sup>1</sup> ODRC, *Annual Report 2022*, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (Dec. 2022), <https://drc.ohio.gov/about/resource/reports/annual-reports/annual-report-2022>.

<sup>2</sup> Lucius Couloute and Daniel Kopf, *Out of Prison & Out of Work: Unemployment among formerly incarcerated people*, Prison Policy Initiative (July 2018), <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>.