

Kevin Fisher
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 the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 198.

After 26 years of incarceration, I was released from Marion Correctional Institution and faced with the daunting task of reintegrating into society. Navigating life after incarceration is challenging, and having access to essential documents and support services is crucial for successful reentry into society. SB 198 would ensure that individuals returning to Ohio with felony convictions receive the necessary resources, such as ID, social security cards, mock interviews, and resume assistance, to help them reintegrate and find employment.

One of the first challenges I encountered was obtaining essential documents such as my ID, social security card, and birth certificate. Upon my release, I was given an ID from the institution, which was not recognized as valid identification outside the facility. This left me feeling lost and unsure of where to turn for help, as my family was in Cleveland, Ohio, and I was in a city where I knew no one.

I attempted to obtain my social security card but was turned away due to my lack of proper identification. I then went to the BMV to get a state ID, only to be informed that I needed to first obtain my birth certificate. This process was unfamiliar to me, and it took time and effort to navigate the system and acquire the necessary documents. It took two weeks to receive my state ID and an additional two to four weeks to receive my social security card which impacted my ability to apply and begin work, causing much stress and uncertainty. During this time, I was eager to work and support myself but found it challenging to apply for jobs online after being incarcerated for so long. Fortunately, while I was at Marion Institution, I attended a TED talk where I heard Joe DeLoss, the owner of Hot Chicken Takeover, speak. I was determined to work there upon my release, despite the difficulties I faced in completing the online application. I eventually succeeded in submitting my application and was hired. I am now proud to be an assistant general manager at Hot Chicken Takeover.

Additionally, during my time inside, someone had used my identity, resulting in legal issues in Cleveland and East Cleveland. I was fortunate to find a lawyer who took my case pro bono and helped me resolve the situation. It could have been helpful to address this before I was released because this was also a significant challenge to address while newly released and unfamiliar with the system.

In addition to supporting the provisions outlined in SB 198, I also believe that some improvements can be made to the bill, specifically requiring DRC to include educational records and a record of groups and programs that the individual has completed while incarcerated. These records would not help someone show a full scope of rehabilitation and allow for accountability to address any errors or missing information that sometimes happens. Furthermore, I support the inclusion of nonprofits, workforce agencies, and employers to be the ones providing resume writing and mock interviews. Outside people provide real hope to us. Also, this will allow us to learn about concrete job opportunities, and programs in the community and make work contact we can follow up with upon release, which was instrumental in my

successful reentry into society. This approach would be far more effective than simply practicing resumes and interviews with other inmates or corrections officers.

I urge you to support SB 198 and these additional provisions to help individuals like me who are seeking to rebuild their lives after incarceration. Thank you for considering my testimony.