

Wendy Tarr  
Executive Director, Accompanying Returning Citizens With Hope (ARCH)  
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 to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 198.

My name is Wendy Tarr and I am the Executive Director of Accompanying Returning Citizens With Hope (ARCH), a nonprofit organization in Columbus, Ohio, that provides reentry services and workforce development for individuals returning from incarceration. I have seen firsthand the challenges faced by those reentering society. ARCH has helped hundreds of returning citizens with reentry services and workforce development. We are a workforce provider for Cafe Overlook, a 6-month workforce training program at the county courthouse that has hired many individuals with culinary training from prison. We are also involved in helping women coming out of prison seeking apprenticeships and nontraditional occupations, as well as providing solar panel installation training and employment linkages with a program that will be launching in three prisons this year.

I am here in support of SB 198. SB 198 would also 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. By providing these resources, SB 198 would not only help individuals rebuild their lives but also strengthen our communities by reducing recidivism and promoting successful reentry into society.

This bill also creates an opportunity to support the government and workforce agencies collaborating with prisons to provide critical services for workforce preparation. Recent efforts to set up “one-stop” centers inside some of Ohio’s prisons through collaboration with Ohio Means Jobs have created an avenue to help implement this legislation. Further collaboration with reentry workforce nonprofits and with Ohio Means Jobs to obtain WIOA funds to help individuals coming home would be critical to help implement effective workforce reentry services.

One recommendation that we would like to see added to the required documents provided by DRC before release is the inclusion of incarcerated persons’ educational and programming reports. Additionally, individuals who qualify for the Certificate of Achievement for Employability (CAE) and information about the Certificate of Qualification for Employment (CQE) should be included as these are important tools for workforce reintegration. These certificates were passed into the Ohio Revised Code to help individuals demonstrate their rehabilitation so they can sit for licensing boards when otherwise would be unable. It also gives employers hiring those with these certificates protection against negligent hiring. Information about the CAE and CQE should be shared with returning citizens preparing for release to ensure they are known and utilized to their fullest potential.

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