



Proponent Testimony SB 198
Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee
Catholic Conference of Ohio
February 27th, 2024

Chair Lang, Vice Chair Wilkin, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee, thank you for the chance to provide proponent testimony today. My name is Will Kuehnle, and I am an associate director with the Catholic Conference of Ohio. The Catholic Conference is the official voice of the Catholic Church in Ohio on matters of public policy, and we are pleased to support Senate Bill 198 to provide inmates with personal and educational documentation as they near the end of their sentence.

The Catholic Conference of Ohio advocates for public policies that ensure that our criminal justice system fulfills its restorative purpose. Restoration demands that we respond to the victims of crime with care and compassion, but the full administration of justice is impossible unless we also attend to the dignity and reintegration of those returning from prison. However, incarcerated men and women face many barriers to successful reintegration, especially unemployment. The Bureau of Justice Statistics finds that three out of five of those once incarcerated struggle with unemployment, in part due to the difficulty of procuring necessary documentation.

Providing applications for identification cards, copies of training records, a birth certificate, and other documents that assist a returning citizen in obtaining employment will yield manifold benefits, both for those involved in the justice system and beyond. The individual benefits from the dignity and ennobling effects of a job, decreasing the likelihood of recidivism. This bill will also benefit employers by growing applicant pools and reducing training costs when hiring candidates who have undergone vocational training while incarcerated. Finally, communities will benefit from the stability of employed neighbors, decreased rates of poverty, collected taxes, and strengthened families.

The parable of the Prodigal Son shows Christians the profound love God has for us, as a reckless son is embraced by his father upon his return home. This parable also exemplifies the principles of a moral criminal justice system and a moral economy, where the dignity of every individual is recognized as we, like the father, are filled with compassion and run out to welcome the one who was lost and has been found. SB 198 is a laudable example of what such a criminal justice system looks like, and Catholic prison ministers across the state are eager to see its passage.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to answer your questions.