



*BEFORE THE SENATE SMALL BUSINESS & ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY COMMITTEE
PROPONENT TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 198*

Good morning, Chairman Lang, Vice Chair Wilkin, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Senate Small Business & Economic Opportunity Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 198. My name is Justin Barnes, and I am the Director of Workforce, Small Business, and Technology Policy for the Ohio Chamber of Commerce.

As you may know, for 129 years, the Ohio Chamber has served as the state's leading business advocate, and we represent over 8,000 companies that do business in Ohio. Our mission is to aggressively champion free enterprise, economic competitiveness, and growth for the benefit of all Ohioans. As part of our mission, we seek to make Ohio the best place in the country for businesses to operate and grow.

Business across Ohio consistently tell us that one of the largest challenges they face on a day-to-day basis is identifying and recruiting the workforce necessary to fulfill the needs of their operations. This issue impacts companies in every industry, of every size, and from all corners of the state. Efforts to address this challenge are among our top priorities before you in the state legislature.

Senate Bill 198, introduced by Chairman Lang and Senator Manning, is one such measure that can help to bridge the gap that exists in our workforce needs. This legislation seeks to ensure those individuals returning to society from a corrections facility have important documentation, including state ID cards or drivers' licenses and a history of any training or work performed during their period of incarceration, which helps ease the transition by removing barriers to identifying and achieving gainful employment upon release.

We thank the Chairman for his work on this legislation and are proud to support it. Supporting workforce participation for individuals with a criminal record is a key recommendation highlighted in a study published by the Ohio Chamber in October 2022, *Blueprint for Ohio's Economic Future*. A survey conducted by Accenture and published as part of the *Blueprint* focused on identifying "hidden workers" and how best to engage them. A finding in that survey suggests that 10 percent of respondents felt that not having a government-issued ID would keep them from finding work, with 9 percent suggesting a criminal background check would stop them from finding work. As you heard from the Chair, finding employment after release is a key contributor to reducing recidivism, and making positive contributions to their community. This legislation endeavors to eliminate those barriers to seeking and gaining employment and is a welcome change to the process of rehabilitating those convicted of crimes.

We look forward to working with you on this proposal to enhance Ohio's release and reentry policies and remove barriers to employment for those transitioning back to civilian life. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this legislation.