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To: Ohio Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee
Fr: Kevin Werner
Re: Proponent testimony, SB 198
February 27, 2024

Chair Lang, Vice-Chair Wilkin, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on Senate Bill 198, a measure to improve opportunities for returning citizens as they re-enter society after incarceration. On behalf of the Ohio Justice & Policy Center, we are grateful to Senators Lang and Manning for introducing this legislation. My name is Kevin Werner and I am the policy director at OJPC. We are a nonprofit law firm with offices in Cincinnati and Columbus, whose mission is to promote fair, intelligent, and redemptive criminal justice systems.

The Ohio Justice & Policy Center supports this legislation because it is precisely the type of intelligent reform that Ohio needs as our state marches on toward being the most business-friendly state in the nation. This legislation recognizes that the workforce of tomorrow includes that person who made a mistake, but who has turned the corner and is eager to join the workforce, contribute to the economy and provide for herself and her family.

Mr. Chairman, I want to draw on a well-known anecdote about release from prison to highlight the stark policy change within this bill. The story is one that many people in re-entry spaces have heard, and unfortunately, an all-too-common throughline for people returning from incarceration. \$75 and a bus ticket. That's what you get when you leave prison. \$75 and a bus ticket.

Under the bill, the department of rehabilitation will provide each person documentation to assist in obtaining employment, including creating a resume and practicing for job interviews. These two aspects of the bill may seem trivial—but as anyone who has ever run small business knows—when you are hiring for positions the first two steps are reviewing a resume then conducting an interview.

Another provision of which we are very supportive is ensuring individuals have an ID when leaving DRC custody. This provision is another that might seem trivial to people who have never experienced poverty or incarceration. To understand its impact, and the barriers removed by this provision of the bill, here are some things you cannot do without an ID. Get a job. Open a bank account. Vote. Buy cold medicine or a prescription from a pharmacy. Enroll your child in school. The list goes on.



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By providing an ID to every person leaving prison, this legislation removes dozens of barriers that exist solely because a person doesn't have an ID card. The other important aspect of the bill's ID provision is the immediate opportunity to join the workforce. People returning from incarceration can focus on the job search, the interview processes and not waiting weeks or months for the requisite documents to be requested then sent from the social security administration, the department of vital statistics and so on.

Chair Lang and members of the committee, this legislation changes our posture from \$75 and a bus ticket to job-ready, in-hand skills and documentation designed to remove barriers and increase likelihood of success after incarceration.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of SB 198. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.