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Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony regarding House Bill 5. My name is Sierra Cooper and I'm an attorney with Legal Aid of Southeast and Central Ohio where I serve as the lead of the Columbus Reentry Team. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Legal Aid of Southeast and Central Ohio is a non-profit legal services organization that provides legal advice and representation to low-income clients in 36 of Ohio's counties. Our mission is to provide civil legal aid and advocacy to overcome unfairness and injustice, reduce poverty, and increase opportunity.

I'd first like to say how thrilled I am about House Bill 5's proposal for automatic record sealing. Automating the criminal record sealing process will hugely benefit Legal Aid's clients. The vast majority of employers and landlords rely on background checks to screen applicants. I have seen first-hand how many of my clients are denied jobs and housing because of the volume of records in their criminal history, regardless of the types or levels of the offenses, or how long ago they occurred. Record sealing is a vital tool to ensure public safety and reduce recidivism by providing opportunities for growth to folks with criminal records.

The record sealing process can be lengthy and complicated for a person to navigate on their own. Our office is happy to provide help and representation when appropriate, but the demand is higher than we can meet. Automating this process will provide greater access to record sealing and ensure that those with criminal convictions can truly move forward to better employment, housing, and education opportunities. House Bill 5 will provide much needed streamlining to a complex process.

Automated record sealing is incredibly helpful in providing an avenue for steady employment and safe housing for those with lower-level criminal convictions.