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Interested Party Testimony Regarding House Bill 5

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Ohio Poverty Law Center
House Judiciary Committee
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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 Zack Eckles, and I am an attorney with the Ohio Poverty Law Center (OPLC). Our mission is to reduce poverty and increase justice by protecting and expanding the legal rights of Ohioans living, working, and raising their families in poverty.

There are approximately 2.5 million adults in the state of Ohio who with a criminal record that could prevent them from finding adequate housing. Policy Matters Ohio estimates **the average formerly incarcerated Ohioan who sought but couldn't find work due to criminal history lost \$36,479 in wages in 2017. Total lost wages reached an estimated \$3.4 billion across the state.** The Ohio Legislature has consistently recognized over more than a decade that criminal records and their affect on employment are bad for both individual Ohioans and the state as a whole and has passed a multitude of bills since 2012 expanding eligibility for sealing and expungement.

Unfortunately, although the legislature has spent more than a decade on the bipartisan project of increasing eligibility to criminal record sealing and expungement, not enough Ohioans have been able to avail themselves of the benefits. In a recent study of criminal record sealing in Ohio, the OSU Drug Enforcement and Policy Center found:

"The number of record sealing orders received by Ohio BCI went up from 29,585 in 2011 to 46,129 in 2021, representing a 55% increase. While this is a positive development, there is also a reason to worry that the overall utilization rate of record sealing remains low relative to the actual number of potentially eligible individuals. For instance, when we look at the number of incoming court cases from each of these years (825,416 of criminal cases in 2011 and 601,536 criminal cases in 2021), the numbers of granted record sealing petitions are rather overshadowed"

Enacting House Bill 5 and creating a more automated process for the sealing of low-level felonies and misdemeanors would be an enormous step forward for the State of Ohio. **H.B. 5's criminal record sealing provisions would make the sealing process more streamlined and efficient while also improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of Ohioans, helping them secure gainful employment and adequate housing.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important legislation. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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