PRISON FELLOWSHIP

Seek justice. Love mercy. Restore hope.

Ohio Statehouse
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, OH 43215

September 19, 2025

HB 296 Proponent Testimony – House Judiciary Committee

Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, and Ranking Member Synenburg, and members of the committee: I am Ally Alfonsetti, Legislative Strategist for Prison Fellowship. Thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on House Bill 296. I also want to thank Representative Miller for her leadership and the co-sponsors on the bill.

I am presenting testimony on behalf of Prison Fellowship, the nation's largest Christian nonprofit equipping the Church to serve currently and formerly incarcerated people and their families. Prison Fellowship serves men and women in eight Ohio prisons, through values-based programming like the Prison Fellowship Academy.

In the early period after prison, the risks of recidivism, suicide, drug relapse, homelessness, and unemployment for men and women are particularly high.[1] To aid this transition period, this legislation provides individuals returning from incarceration or transitional control with a six-month grace period during which they are not required to make payments on court-assessed fines, fees, or other financial sanctions related to their criminal case. The bill does not apply to restitution and does not forgive or reduce the total amount owed.

This bill would help ensure that formerly incarcerated Ohioans can prioritize the stability needed in this key window to leave crime and destructive behavior behind and avoid a return to prison. Financial sanctions can be a legitimate tool for holding individuals accountable for crime but should not be unduly burdensome to the steadiness and success of those with a criminal record. When court debt appears to be an unattainable amount, a criminal defendant may be less likely to make payments.[2] Delaying debt payment until there is more capability to pay has the potential to increase the collection rate.

The various consequences of nonpayment of court debt can inhibit an individual's ability to pursue success and opportunity after serving their time. Depending on the case, non-payment of court debt can result in a civil judgment that can further disrupt access to employment and housing, or even imprisonment.[3]

Ohio has made great strides in supporting Ohioans during reentry, we hope that this work can continue by passing and supporting HB 296.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Ally Alfonsetti
Legislative Strategist
Prison Fellowship

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[1] Lucius Couloute and Daniel Kopf, *Out of Prison & Out of Work: Unemployment among formerly incarcerated people*, Prison Policy Initiative (July 2018), https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html.
[2] Matthew Menendez, et al. *The Steep Costs of Criminal Justice Fees and Fines*, Brennan Center for Justice (Nov. 2019), https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/steep-costs-criminal-justice-fees-and-fines; Bureau of Justice Assistance, *How to Use Structured Fines (Day Fines) as an Intermediate Sanction,* U.S. Department of Justice (November 1996), https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles/156242.pdf.
[3] Ohio, *Collection of Court Costs & Fines in Adult Trial Courts,* The Supreme Court of Ohio https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/Publications/JCS/finesCourtCosts.pdf (last visited Dec. 2024); Ohio Rev. Code § 2929.18 (2013).