House Bill 296

In the House Judiciary Committee

Committee Hearing on September 24, 2025

Position: SUPPORT

To Chairman Thomas and the Esteemed Members of the Ohio House Judiciary Committee,

As Legislative Manager for REFORM Alliance, I write on behalf of my organization in support of House Bill 296. At REFORM Alliance, we aim to transform community supervision by changing laws, systems, and culture to create real pathways to meaningful second chances. We believe that a justice system that holds people accountable and redirects them back to work and wellbeing leads to safer communities. To date, we have passed 22 bipartisan bills in 12 states, creating pathways for more than 850,000 people to exit the system.

REFORM stands in strong support of HB 296. This impactful legislation would prohibit courts from requiring individuals to pay outstanding court-assessed fines, fees, financial sanctions, or costs during the 180 days following their release from a prison sentence of one year or more, or following the completion of a transitional control period, whichever occurs later. This is a meaningful and necessary step toward improving the process of reentry for formerly incarcerated individuals in Ohio. It recognizes that financial stability is a key component of a successful transition back into society and that giving people a reasonable amount of time to regain their footing helps create better long-term outcomes. Providing this critical window allows individuals to prioritize the basic needs of life and establish a foundation before taking on financial obligations that can otherwise become overwhelming.

People leaving incarceration often face enormous challenges as they attempt to reintegrate into society. The period immediately following release is critical for setting the foundation for long-term stability. During this time, individuals are expected to secure housing, seek employment, reconnect with their families, and often address physical and mental health needs. These goals, while essential, can be difficult to achieve when someone is also burdened by the pressure of immediate financial demands. Research indicates that formerly incarcerated individuals face significant challenges securing stable housing due to collateral consequences, and their employment rates during this period are markedly lower than those of

the general population. Moreover, financial sanctions imposed by courts can be significant, with some individuals facing thousands of dollars in fines and fees that create insurmountable barriers to successful reentry.[1] These financial burdens can prevent people from accessing transportation, childcare, or even identification documents, all of which are often necessary to apply for jobs or housing.

Requiring individuals to immediately begin paying court-related financial obligations during this fragile time only adds unnecessary hardship and increases the risk of recidivism.[2] This bill recognizes a simple but powerful truth: stability is essential for reintegration. Providing a period of relief allows individuals to concentrate on rebuilding their lives in a way that supports long-term success. HB 296 offers a commonsense and compassionate approach that balances accountability with opportunity. It supports public safety by helping individuals build productive lives after incarceration rather than setting them up to fail. We urge the House Judiciary Committee, and the General Assembly as a whole, for passage of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Shá Sanders
Legislative Manager
REFORM Alliance

[1] The Steep Costs of Criminal Justice Fees and Fines
[2] 50 State Survey: Probation & Parole Fees