TO: Ohio House Judiciary Committee
FROM: Patrick Higgins, Senior Policy Counsel, ACLU of Ohio, phiggins@acluohio.org
DATE: September 24, 2025
RE: HB 296 – Proponent Testimony

Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify as a proponent of House Bill 296, a straightforward approach to easing the often insurmountable burdens faced by neighbors returning to our communities from Ohio's prisons and transitional control. Of the many individuals who are in Ohio's prisons and on transitional control, most will come home and our communities fare better when their reentry happens with intention and support. It is for this reason that we believe policies that ease reentry are worthy of your consideration. The ACLU of Ohio supports HB 296 because of a value that I believe this Committee shares, we want our neighbors navigating the reentry process to do so successfully.

It is with this shared value in mind that we extend our gratitude to Representative Miller for introducing this important legislation and making the case for it so clearly. As Ohioans return to their communities after incarceration, they are faced with a tall order of costly tasks including finding a place to live, securing gainful employment, accessing reliable transportation, and meeting other basic needs in a short period of time. When each of these needs is tied to successful reentry outcomes, it only makes sense to delay immediate financial burdens imposed by the State that may interfere with this process. As the language delineates and Representative Miller has made clear, HB 296 does not forgive or otherwise eliminate outstanding court costs and fines. Instead, it gives our returning neighbors a chance to prioritize their immediate needs that are proven to reduce recidivism before being required to tackle court debt.

Rather than keeping our neighbors trapped in cycles of poverty and punishment, we believe this legislation will give formerly-incarcerated Ohioans a chance to succeed. As with many of the issues tackled by this General Assembly, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to reentry. What we do know is that successful reentry takes time and HB 296 honors this. Successful reentry can take a lifetime, but available data tells us that recidivism is most likely in the first year after release.[1] It is for this reason we encourage you to consider making the six-month grace period a one-year grace period. Lengthier timline or not, this is good policy that recognizes the realities of reentry as well as the importance of setting our returning neighbors up to succeed.

We are grateful to this Committee for the opportunity to support HB 296 and encourage you to report it favorably.

[1] *See* RECIDIVISM REPORT, OHIO DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION AND CORRECTION 2021. https://tinyurl.com/y932vy33 (last accessed Sep. 22, 2025). *See also Phases of Reentry*, PRISON FELLOWSHIP, https://tinyurl.com/4nk9ukkc (last accessed Sep. 22, 2025).