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Proponent Testimony in Support of House Bill 296

Zack Eckles, Esq.
Ohio Poverty Law Center
House Judiciary Committee
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Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of House Bill 296. 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.

According to Ohio Department of Corrections, over 18,000 people leave their prisons every year. When they do, it is often very difficult to immediately find employment. 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.** For someone leaving incarceration and re-entering society, the ability to find financial stability in the time immediately following release is extremely important to prevent recidivism.

During this precarious time, House Bill 296 would provide people with an important grace period of 180 days during which they would not be required to pay any outstanding court-assessed fines, fees, financial sanctions, or costs arising from a criminal proceeding. **These fines and fees are not forgiven, and the delayed obligation to pay does not apply to restitution owed to a victim.** H.B. 296 does not relieve anyone of their debts to society, but it would give them an opportunity to get back on their feet before the bills come due.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this important legislation. Please vote in favor of H.B. 296. I would be happy to answer any questions by phone or email.

Sincerely,

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