Office of the Ohio Public Defender

Elizabeth R. Miller, *State Public Defender*

House Bill 296 Proponent Testimony
Zachary Miller, Legislative Policy Manager
House Judiciary Committee
September 24, 2025

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

On behalf of the Office of the Ohio Public Defender ("OPD"), thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony on House Bill 296 ("HB 296"). This bill is an important step towards a more just and effective criminal justice system in Ohio.

HB 296 proposes a reasonable and compassionate delay in the collection of most court-assessed financial obligations immediately following an individual's release from prison or a period of transitional control. Specifically, it would prohibit a court from requiring payment of outstanding court assessed fines, fees, financial sanctions, or court costs during the 180 days after release from a prison sentence of one year or more, or after completion of transitional control, whichever is later. This grace period does not apply to victim restitution , which would remain payable upon release.

For those re-entering society after incarceration, this bill offers critical support. The first six months after release are pivotal: individuals are seeking stable housing, finding employment, and reconnecting with their families – often with little to no financial resources. Burdening them with immediate financial demands for court costs and fines can create an insurmountable barrier to economic stability, risking them falling back into the very systems we hope to help them avoid. By providing the 180-day grace period, HB 296 gives these returning citizens a chance to focus on securing employment and housing, which are the foundational elements of a prosperous life post-incarceration. HB 296 promotes successful re-entry, reduces the likelihood of recidivism, and ultimately makes our communities safer.

The OPD applauds the introduction of HB 296, recognizing that everyone deserves a fair opportunity to rebuild their lives post-incarceration. HB 296 is a step forward in supporting restorative justice and safer communities, and the OPD urges this body's support.

Thank you,

Zachary J. Miller
Legislative Policy Manager
Office of the Ohio Public Defender
Zachary.miller@opd.ohio.gov