

House Bill 96
Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry
Maria Foschia, President and CEO
House Public Safety Committee
March 5, 2025

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Thomas, and Members of the Ohio House Public Safety Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on behalf of the Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry (LMM) and the individuals we serve throughout Ohio. My name is Maria Foschia, President and CEO of LMM. I am here to advocate for funding to sustain and expand our reentry and workforce development programs. These programs have a profound and transformative impact on the lives of returning citizens from across the State of Ohio, offering them a second chance and the opportunity to create a stable, self-sufficient life.

For over five decades, LMM has operated at the intersection of public safety, workforce development, and reentry services, assisting individuals transitioning from incarceration back into the community by equipping them with the skills, resources, and support necessary for long-term success. Our mission is based on the belief that everyone deserves a second chance—an opportunity to create a stable, self-sufficient life. However, second chances don't occur by accident; they require intentional, proven interventions that tackle the real barriers individuals encounter when reentering society. LMM is proud to serve as a second chance employer, as several of my staff partners have lived experience.

One of our most successful programs, Chopping for Change, exemplifies this approach. In partnership with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC), this innovative initiative provides vocational training in culinary arts while incorporating trauma-informed education and comprehensive case management. The results have been undeniable: more than 400 graduates; program participants have an under-three percent recidivism rate, starkly contrasting with the state's overall recidivism rate. This program does more than teach kitchen skills—it equips individuals with industry-recognized certifications, job placement support, and personal development tools that help them establish a foundation for success. Many of our graduates have secured stable employment in the food industry, achieving economic independence and breaking cycles of incarceration. They have reunited with their families.

Beyond Chopping for Change, LMM manages Central Kitchen and the recently expanded Metro45 Café, Catering, and Food Truck. These social enterprises provide hands-on training and employment for program participants. These initiatives enable individuals to gain practical work experience and empower them to reinvest in their own communities, fostering economic growth and public safety.

Despite these successes, LMM does not currently receive state funding for these crucial reentry programs. Although we have worked diligently to sustain these initiatives through private partnerships, grants, and local support, ongoing funding is essential to ensure their long-term viability. The return on investment is evident: lower recidivism rates lead to safer communities, reduced correctional expenses, and a more robust workforce in Ohio. By investing in proven reentry programs like those at LMM, the state can foster meaningful, long-term public safety solutions that disrupt the cycle of incarceration.

On behalf of the individuals we serve, I want to express our deepest gratitude for your time, consideration, and commitment to policies promoting successful reentry and working together to strengthen Ohio's workforce. Your dedication to this cause is truly appreciated. I welcome any questions you may have.