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Ohio House Small Business Committee

September 30, 2025

Written Testimony in Support of H.B. 268

Submitted by Tianay Amat, President & CEO, Cincinnati Works

Chairman Ghanbari, Vice Chairman Dean, Ranking Member Upchurch, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 268, which reduces the waiting period for Ohioans with a felony conviction to apply for a Certificate of Qualification for Employment (CQE). My name is Tianay Amat. I am the President & CEO of Cincinnati Works.

Cincinnati Works is a nonprofit workforce development organization founded in 1996. Our mission is to eliminate poverty through employment. Each year, we serve thousands of job seekers in Greater Cincinnati, many of whom face multiple barriers to employment, including criminal records. We also partner with nearly 100 local and regional employers across industries such as healthcare, manufacturing, hospitality, and logistics to fill open positions with quality candidates, retain employees, and build stronger career pathways.

Our Fair Chance Works initiative is specifically dedicated to supporting individuals impacted by incarceration. Through career coaching, financial literacy, and trauma-informed services, we provide the tools necessary for Members to reenter the workforce, achieve stability, and contribute positively to their families and communities.

We believe H.B. 268 will have a profound impact because:

1. **It directly supports our Members.**

Many of the individuals we serve are ready and eager to work within months of release. Delays in accessing a CQE prolong hardship, discourage progress, and make it more difficult to secure stable employment. Allowing application one year after release provides a fairer and more practical pathway forward.

2. **It benefits our employer partners.**

Employers regularly report difficulty finding and retaining reliable workers. By expediting the CQE process, more qualified candidates will become eligible sooner, strengthening the labor pool and providing businesses with the talent they urgently need.

3. **It strengthens Ohio communities.**

Research shows that meaningful employment is one of the strongest predictors of reduced recidivism. With earlier access to employment opportunities, individuals are more likely to stay on a positive trajectory, which benefits



families, neighborhoods, and the state economy.

At Cincinnati Works, we have seen countless examples of Members who, once given a fair chance, thrive in the workplace, advance in their careers, and break the cycles of poverty and incarceration. H.B. 268 aligns with our mission and the needs of our community by ensuring that redemption and access to employment are not delayed by unnecessary bureaucracy.

Our experience shows how critical timely access to employment is for returning citizens. Once Members complete our job readiness program, they are connected with one of our 98 employer partners. Because of these strong employer relationships, the average time from application to hire is just 16 days. Placements over the past 12 months average a starting rate of \$18.50 per hour, and of the Members placed, 40% earned a technical certification that positions them better for career advancement opportunities.

The proposed reduction in the waiting period for a Certificate of Qualification for Employment (CQE) aligns directly with these outcomes. By shortening the time before individuals can apply for a CQE, the bill ensures that returning citizens have faster access to the types of employment opportunities our Members are already demonstrating lead to higher wages, quicker placements, and greater chances for advancement. In short, the bill removes unnecessary delays that keep people from becoming contributing employees, strengthening both families and the local workforce.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge your support of H.B. 268. This legislation is a critical step toward strengthening Ohio's workforce, reducing recidivism, and ensuring that more of our neighbors have the opportunity to contribute to a safer and more prosperous state.

Respectfully submitted,
Tianay Amat, President & CEO
Cincinnati Works