

Proponent Testimony on House Bill 100
House Ways & Means Committee
Willie Knighten, Re-Entry Specialist, Goodwill Industries of Northwest Ohio
April 9, 2025

Chair Roemer, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Troy, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today in support of House Bill 100. My name is Willie Knighten, and I am a Re-Entry Specialist at Goodwill Industries of Northwest Ohio, which serves 13 counties. At Goodwill we offer a variety of employment programs which includes assistance writing a resume, training in digital literacy and certifications for in-demand jobs, assessing job skills, and job placements.

Goodwill is a valued partner in strengthening our State's existing economy as well as preparing for future economic development. We tailor workforce programming to meet the needs of the communities we serve and the needs of local and future employers. We focus on the number one resource in business, the human resource.

I have lived experience when returning home after incarceration. I know the struggles that returning citizen's face and the lack of resources available to help people reenter society. The need far outweighs the funding available. In 2024, in Northwest Ohio we served 592 returning citizens with direct assistance removing barriers to employment. We were directly involved in connecting individuals with getting their driver's license, obtaining a birth certificate, purchasing clothing, and assisting with reinstatement fees all to clear the runway for employment.

Last year, we placed 139 returning citizens into jobs with local employers and continued working with these individuals after they found employment. Based on statistics from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, it costs roughly \$100 per day to incarcerate someone. The average stay in prison is 2.73 years. Based on these numbers, it costs the State of Ohio roughly \$36,000 to incarcerate someone for one year and \$100,000 for 2.73 years. Clearly, there is an economic benefit to identifying alternatives to incarceration. Goodwill programs that help people with prior legal histories find employment have been proven to dramatically reduce the recidivism rate. The recidivism rate for our Goodwill Reentry Program is 5% as compared to the State's rate of 30%. This program is one example of a workforce development program that could be expanded to serve more individuals should HB100 become law. By passing HB100, you will have a direct effect of helping people in our State who need a hand up to financial independence and a true second chance.

While we support the needs of thousands of individuals in our communities, there is much more that we can do to provide employment opportunities for Ohioans with disabilities and other barriers to employment with additional funding that this grant program will provide.

I ask for your support of House Bill 100 to allow nonprofit organizations that sell donated goods to apply for grants through the Department of Development to create or expand job training and job placement programs. This program will more than pay for itself through increased payrolls and reduced public benefits and recidivism rates. Please support this proposal, which will allow us to

connect more individuals with the power of work. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.