

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hudson, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 96. My name is Amy Wachob, President and CEO for Goodwill Industries of Northwest Ohio, which serves 13 counties.

Today, I would like to express my strong support for a proposed budget amendment that would allow nonprofit retailers with donation operations and workforce development programs to apply for a state grant equal to 25% of the sales taxes they paid in the previous year. These funds would be reinvested directly into workforce development programs that help Ohioans gain the skills and support they need to succeed in the job market.

The Ohio Association of Goodwill Industries is comprised of 14 autonomous Goodwill organizations across the state. We tailor our workforce programs to meet the unique needs of our communities and the employers we serve. Since 1902, Goodwill's mission is to empower individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment achieve financial independence and improve their quality of life through the power of work. From serving those with justice-involved backgrounds and homeless veterans to providing childcare, mental health services, rape crisis support, and housing assistance, Goodwill organizations take a holistic approach to workforce development. We meet people where they are and work to remove the barriers that prevent them from fully participating in the workforce.

In 2024, Ohio Goodwill placed nearly 4,500 people into employment through partnerships with local employers. We also served over 96,000 Ohioans through a comprehensive range of employment services, including résumé development, digital literacy training, industry-recognized certifications, job skills assessments, and job placement assistance.

In Northwest Ohio, we specialize in workforce development that cater to the needs in our community. Such programs include overcoming the benefits cliff, youth and young adult, and transportation. We also place a strong emphasis on reentry services. In 2024, Goodwill of Northwest Ohio served 592 returning citizens, helping them overcome barriers to employment by assisting with driver permits, birth certificates, professional clothing, and reinstatement fees, all high-impact steps that help clear the path to sustainable employment.

Because of our demonstrated success, last year I was honored to present before Chief Justice Kennedy and her Task Force on Reentry. Our reentry program was proudly highlighted in the Task Force's final report as a model of best practice for the state to invest in and scale. That recognition speaks volumes about the real, measurable impact Goodwill programs are having in Northwest Ohio, and across the entire state.

I'd like to introduce Willie Knighten, who serves as a Re-Entry Support Specialist at our Goodwill.

Chair Cirino, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Willie Knighten, and I am a Re-Entry Specialist at Goodwill Industries of Northwest Ohio. I have lived experience when returning home after incarceration. I know the struggles that returning citizens face and the lack of resources available to help people reenter society. The need far outweighs the funding available.

Upon my release, there were many barriers to a successful reentry. Many times, employers did not believe in the benefits of second chances. At one time returning citizens were counted out and now our programs are helping them to be counted on. I understand what returning citizens face when attempting to enter the workforce. We are a valuable asset to the community, especially when given the opportunity for gainful employment, however funding assistance is critical.

Last year, in Northwest Ohio, we helped 139 returning citizens secure jobs with local employers and continued to support them after they were hired. According to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, it costs the state approximately \$100 per day—or \$36,000 per year—to incarcerate someone. With the average prison stay in Ohio lasting 2.73 years, that amounts to nearly \$100,000 per individual. Clearly, there is a strong economic case for investing in alternatives to incarceration. Goodwill's reentry programs offer a proven, cost-effective solution: our recidivism rate is just 5%, compared to the statewide average of 32.7%.

Funding from this grant program would allow us to provide transformative training and education such as CDL's, forklift training, Barber College, STNA, and the trades.

At a time when businesses are citing their top challenge is a shortage of available workers, organizations like Goodwill can play a pivotal role in addressing this issue. By investing in workforce programs specifically geared toward getting people off the sidelines and back into the labor market, we can help ensure businesses have the skilled workforce they need to fill these new jobs.

Goodwill is a part of the business community, and we see ourselves as workforce partners with local employers throughout Ohio. We understand the needs of employers and what it will take for businesses to continue to thrive and choose Ohio as their home. I am pleased to share that this proposal has the support of the Ohio Chamber.

This proposed budget amendment would allow the needed funding to expand our work and reach more Ohioans who are eager to contribute to our economy but need a hand up to do so. I urge you to support this important measure and help ensure that nonprofit workforce providers like Goodwill can continue to invest in the people and communities we serve. Thank you for your time and consideration. We are happy to answer any questions.