



**Center for
Employment
Opportunities**

**Ohio Senate
Finance Committee
May 30, 2025
Interested Party Testimony on House Bill 96**

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Oluwatosin Martins and I am the Midwest Regional Director for the Center for Employment Opportunities or “CEO”. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today about our work across Ohio, and the need for increased employment training investment for individuals returning home from prison.

CEO is a nonprofit social enterprise that exclusively focuses on jobs during reentry. Since 2017, we have served more than 3,500 justice-impacted individuals in Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Columbus by providing immediate jobs, daily pay, and robust, evidence-based workforce development programming.

From the first day a participant walks in our door, we employ them on a job and begin working on removing barriers to permanent employment. We partner with public employers, such as the Ohio Department of Transportation, and private employers, to provide transitional jobs. In team based crews, individuals work four days a week, earn a daily pay check, and develop their skills like learning new hand and power tools, completing work with peers, and providing feedback to their boss. When not working, participants meet with vocational staff to learn digital skills, like sending an email; and solve challenges, such as lack of transportation, that might keep them from finding success in a job following CEO. When they are ready, the participant then interviews with second chance employers in the community, and we provide retention services for a year post-placement. Also, CEO participants are always welcome back to our program if they need additional employment support post-placement.

This year, we are serving 320 individuals and already placed 147 individuals into a job following our program. In addition to providing initial work experience for a resume, we focus on providing advanced credentialing that may lead to higher paying job. For example, in Columbus our average wage at placement is \$17.74 currently.

Our program model has been extensively evaluated by third parties and has demonstrated increased public safety and employment outcomes. We have an intentional focus on individuals facing the most significant barriers, such as those who have been incarcerated for a long period or have not worked before. Our success is due in large part to the Ohio Legislature investing in transitional job

and vocational coaching training programs in previous budgets. Almost everyone in prison comes home and needs to get back on track with a job. More than 17,000 individuals are released from prison statewide annually, yet up to 75% of individuals are unemployed up to a year post-release. CEO requests that the Legislature continue investing in reentry employment in this biennium.

CEO respectfully requests that the Ohio General Assembly adopt amendment SC0103 and continue its investment in reentry employment in this budget and appropriate \$1,00,000 over the biennium to invest in quality jobs for more people. This funding is not new money but would actually be appropriated through ODRC's existing Parole and Community Operations line. CEO's program was previously funded in the last two operating budgets and we request that this General Assembly continue this funding.

This year, CEO will serve individuals at an average cost of \$10,000 per participant. Our direct participant expenses are increasing, outpacing current funding available to programs like ours. In the last two years, CEO strengthened program quality by adding more advanced training opportunities. These credentials lead to higher paying careers for people with the highest barriers to employment but can cost an additional \$7,000 per participant. The investment is worth it - CEO participants who complete advanced training have a 30% increase in wages compared to similar participants who do not.

In 2023, one of our former participants, [Abu](#) was released from prison and referred to CEO by his parole officer for help finding a job. He gained work experience via our ODOT partnership and identified a manufacturing program he was interested in at Columbus State Community College. CEO covered the tuition and after successfully completing the program, two employers offered Abu a job. He took the offer from a food manufacturing company at a generous hourly wage, and within two months earned a promotion with a raise and full benefits.

We want each participant to have success like Abu. With continued increased investment, organizations like CEO can expand their impact and enhance partnerships with local businesses and government agencies to create more and better jobs during reentry.

Thank you for your time, attention, and investment in our communities.

Oluwatosin Martins
Regional Program Director, Midwest
Center for Employment Opportunities