

**Ohio Senate
Workforce Development Committee
October 3, 2025
Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 143**

Chair Koehler, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Workforce Development Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for Senate Bill 143 (SB 143). My name is Seth VanHorn and I am the Director of Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) Columbus. CEO is the nation's largest nonprofit re-entry employment provider. Since 2017, we have offered immediate, comprehensive, and effective employment services exclusively to individuals with prior justice involvement, including those on community supervision. Annually, we serve 350+ job-seekers with criminal records across our Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Columbus offices. We provide immediate jobs, daily pay, and robust, evidence-based workforce development programming. Our programming includes providing advanced credentialing that may lead to a long-term, higher paying job. For example, in Columbus, our average wage at placement is \$17.74. We believe every person returning from incarceration should have the opportunity for a quality job that supports their social and economic mobility.

SB 143 would allow people with a criminal history to apply to jobs in the private sector with the confidence that they will be evaluated based on the skills, experience, and person they are today, just as any other applicant. Nearly ten years ago, the state passed House Bill 56, which prohibited public employers from inquiring about criminal history at the time of an application. This important reform opened pathways for individuals pursuing civil careers, but challenges persist for job-seekers in the private sector, which represents a vast majority (90%) of the state's workforce¹.

Studies consistently show that employment after incarceration is key in reducing recidivism and rebuilding stability and social networks that deter criminal activity.² When people enroll in our program, they are incredibly motivated to work. However, our participants face a stigma that too often bars them from employment early in the hiring process, typically before they've had an opportunity to interview to demonstrate their qualifications and experience. Hiring barriers are experienced by all justice-impacted job-seekers, including those with misdemeanor convictions and even minor arrest records.

¹ Ohio Labor Market Information, Current Employment Statistics (CES) by Industry Sector, August 2025

² "Criminal Background Checks: Impact on Employment", Duane, Vigne, Lynch & Reimal, Urban Institute,

If enacted, SB 143 will prohibit employers with five or more employees from including questions about criminal background on initial employment applications and from inquiring about or considering an applicant's criminal history during the early stages of the hiring process. By limiting the use of conviction history in the early stages of the hiring process, we reduce preemptive judgements relative to an individual's ability and character, and allow their potential for positive future contributions to come to fruition. These fair chance hiring practices will offer a significant return on investment, both from a performance and retention perspective.³

More than one dozen states⁴ have already recognized the importance of extending fair chance hiring policies beyond the public sector. If all Ohioans are fairly evaluated for a place in the workforce we will not only improve communities, but improve the state's economy by expanding the number of eligible and driven employees ready to work.

According to a 2021 Workplace Survey by SHRM⁵:

- 81% of business leaders and 85% of HR professionals believe that people with criminal records perform just as well or better than those without criminal records.
- People with convictions are more committed to being employed.
- People with more serious convictions perform better in all organizations, while people with less serious convictions do better at smaller organizations.

Finally, we want to thank Senator Craig and Senator Blessing for their leadership in bringing this bill forward and respectfully request the committee's support of SB 143. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide proponent testimony and I would be happy to answer any questions you have at this time.

_Seth VanHorn
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³ *"Does a Criminal Past Predict Worker Performance? Evidence from One of America's Largest Employers"* Ludquist, Pager, Strader, Social Forces 2018

⁴ *"Ban the Box Hiring Guide"*, National Employment Law Project

⁵ *"Getting Talent Back to Work"*, Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM), 2021