

**Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 143**  
**Ohio Senate Workforce Development Committee**  
**January 27, 2026**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 143.

My name is Scott Johnson. I am here today in my role at **Aspyr**, a workforce innovation organization that houses the Workforce Development Board for Franklin County. I also serve as the **Director of the Central Ohio Workforce Development Network**, or COWDN—a collective impact network of workforce development organizations focused on creating opportunity and upward mobility for all, while also better supporting employers by reducing unnecessary barriers and burdensome processes.

From that vantage point, I want to be clear at the outset:

**Senate Bill 143 is a practical workforce policy that balances jobseekers' opportunities with employers' flexibility and protection.**

Across Central Ohio, employers consistently tell us they are struggling to find and retain qualified workers. At the same time, our workforce partners see capable, motivated jobseekers screened out very early in the hiring process—often before anyone has reviewed their skills, credentials, or work history. In many cases, that early exclusion happens because of a single question on an initial job application.

Senate Bill 143 addresses this disconnect in a narrow and reasonable way. It removes questions about criminal history from *initial* employment applications, allowing candidates to be evaluated on their qualifications first. It does not prohibit background checks. It does not require employers to hire anyone. It simply focuses on **when** certain information is considered. We already see this approach working with employers across Central Ohio.

For example, a **mid-sized Central Ohio manufacturer** we work with removed criminal history questions from its initial application many years ago as part of a broader effort to widen its applicant pool. As a result, more qualified candidates moved past the first screen and into interviews. Background checks still occurred later in the process where appropriate, but the company reports stronger job matching, improved retention, and the development of long-term leaders who may never have been considered under a skills-blind screening process.

We see similar results with **small businesses**. One locally owned service business, with fewer than 20 employees, made the same change after struggling to fill entry-level positions. Without the box on the application, the owner was able to meet candidates face-to-face and evaluate reliability, work ethic, and job fit first. Background-informed decisions still occurred when appropriate, but the employer credits this approach with stabilizing their workforce without adding cost or administrative burden.

These experiences reflect what we hear repeatedly from employers: **removing the box does not remove discretion—it improves access to talent.**

From a workforce system perspective, the goal is not just employment. The goal is **upward mobility**. Many of the families we work with are already employed yet still fall below what is often referred to as the ALICE threshold, meaning income, hours, or job stability are not sufficient to meet basic household needs. The most effective way to reduce long-term reliance on state-supported benefits is not by restricting those programs, but by improving access to jobs that offer stability, advancement, and wage progression.

By allowing jobseekers to be screened on skills first and background second, Senate Bill 143 increases the likelihood that qualified individuals reach interviews, secure employment, and remain attached to the workforce. Over time, better job matching supports retention and income growth—helping more families move toward financial independence.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to give favorable consideration to Senate Bill 143.

Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

**Scott Johnson**

Director, Central Ohio Workforce Development

Aspyr