

**Ohio Senate Workforce Development Committee**  
**January 27, 2026**

**Chair Koehler, Vice Chair, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee:**

My name is Rayshun Holt, and I serve as President of the Beacon of Hope Business Alliance, an employer-led coalition headquartered in Cincinnati that works with companies across Ohio to expand fair-chance hiring and strengthen workforce participation for individuals with prior justice involvement. Beacon of Hope Business Alliance was founded by Nehemiah Manufacturing, a Cincinnati-based employer nationally recognized for its second-chance employment model. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Substitute Senate Bill 143.

SB 143 addresses a critical and well-documented barrier to employment by prohibiting private employers from asking about an applicant's criminal background on an initial employment application. This is a practical, evidence-informed reform that improves hiring outcomes for both jobseekers and employers while preserving appropriate safeguards for public safety and business necessity. Importantly, the substitute bill is narrowly tailored. It does not prohibit background checks, does not require employers to hire any particular applicant, and does not apply where criminal background checks are required by law.

Through my work with employers across Ohio, I have seen firsthand how early disclosure questions on applications prematurely screen out qualified candidates before skills, experience, and fit are ever considered. Employers routinely share that once candidates reach later stages of the hiring process, such as interviews, job previews, or conditional offers, conversations about background history become more individualized, contextual, and relevant to the actual job. SB 143 simply creates the space for that more appropriate and effective evaluation to occur.

Allow me to briefly share a representative experience from our work. Several years ago, I worked with an individual who had stable work history, strong references, and a clear career path in mind, but who was repeatedly denied interviews because of a criminal history question at the application stage. When an employer agreed to remove that question from the initial application and instead assess candidates based on qualifications first, this individual advanced to an interview, disclosed their history honestly later in the process, and was hired. That person went on to become a reliable employee, earned promotions, and today mentors new hires. This outcome was not the result of lowered standards, but of better sequencing in the hiring process.

From an employer perspective, fair-chance hiring is not charity. It is a workforce strategy. Ohio employers continue to face labor shortages, rising turnover, and increased recruitment costs. Employers who delay criminal background inquiries until later in the hiring process consistently report stronger applicant pools, better job matches, and improved retention. SB 143 supports employers in making informed hiring decisions based on the whole person, rather than an early checkbox that often obscures talent and potential.

From a community and public-safety standpoint, employment is one of the strongest predictors of reduced recidivism. When individuals returning from incarceration are blocked at the very

first step of the hiring process, the consequences extend beyond the individual to families, employers, and communities. SB 143 promotes economic stability, supports family well-being, and contributes to safer communities by increasing access to lawful employment.

It is also important to be clear about what SB 143 does not do. It does not prevent employers from conducting criminal background checks later in the hiring process. It does not require employers to ignore convictions that are job-related or pose legitimate risk. It does not apply to positions where background checks are required by federal, state, or local law. These provisions appropriately balance opportunity with employer discretion and public safety.

In closing, SB 143 aligns Ohio with a growing number of states and jurisdictions that recognize fair-chance hiring as both sound public policy and sound business practice. It modernizes hiring norms without imposing undue burden on employers and sends a clear message that Ohio values work, accountability, and economic participation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I respectfully urge the Committee to support Substitute Senate Bill 143.

Sincerely,

Rayshun Holt

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